

Happy, Healthy, Holy Smoke!

Celebratory Discourses in Cannabis Self-Help

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Abstract

Cannabis is imbued with a miraculously diverse range of positive meanings, yet previous research has tended to focus on its negative meanings and stigma. To attain novel insights on cannabis consumption phenomena, this thesis backgrounds the notion of stigma and instead chooses to investigate how cannabis use is celebrated. By conducting a discourse analysis on six recently published cannabis self-help books, this thesis extends previous research on celebratory cannabis discourses. Cannabis self-help books are market-mediated cultural texts where the authors, as cultural intermediaries, offer consumers their expertise on how to attain a “happier, healthier and holier” life with culturally fine-tuned forms of cannabis consumption. This thesis extends the previously monolithic category of celebration by delineating four distinct celebratory positions, that is, four distinct purposes of cannabis consumption with distinct practices. These positions are named the Progressive, the Purist, the Hedonist, and the Optimizer. The Progressive celebrates cannabis as a tool for social progress; the Purist celebrates cannabis’ ability to produce profound shifts in ordinary thought; the Hedonist celebrates cannabis’ ability to immerse the individual into the inherent pleasures of play; the Optimizer celebrates cannabis’ performance-enhancing qualities. Also, two syntheses of these positions are identified. These are Religious Devotion, where cannabis consumption attains a profound significance in the individual’s life; and Cannabis Magic, where practical motives for use are willfully combined with aesthetic and emotional ones. The celebratory positions are shown to have distinct and sometimes mutually opposing consumption goals. The relations between these positions are illustrated with a semiotic square. The analysis of the consumption narratives shows how consumers formulate consumption practices to attain desired consumption goals in accordance with each celebratory position. The results suggest that grouping cannabis users and their purposes into a single category is deficient for understanding the full width of cannabis consumption phenomena. The role of cultural intermediaries in legal cannabis markets is discussed to play a role in legitimizing cannabis consumption but also in producing new needs, wants and desires particularly for consumers who are beyond the black market’s reach.

Keywords Consumer Culture, Cannabis, Self-Help, Cultural Intermediaries, Discourse Analysis

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Tiivistelmä

Kannabikseen liitetään uskomattoman laaja kirjo positiivisia merkityksiä, mutta aikaisemmat tutkimukset ovat keskittyneet lähinnä negatiivisten merkitysten ja stigman tutkimiseen. Tämä tutkielma jättää stigman käsitteen taka-alalle ja keskittyy sen sijaan siihen, miten kannabiksen käyttöä juhlistetaan. Tutkielma laajentaa aikaisempaa tutkimusta kannabiksen juhlallisista diskursseista toteuttamalla diskurssianalyysin kuudesta äskettäin julkaistusta kannabis self-help kirjasta. Kannabis self-help kirjat ovat markkinoiden välittämiä kulttuurisia tekstejä, joiden kirjoittajat, kulttuurin välittäjinä, tarjoavat asiantuntemustaan ”onnellisen, terveellisen ja pyhän” elämän saavuttamiseksi kulttuurisesti sivistyneen kannabiksen käytön avulla. Tutkielma laajentaa aikaisempaa monoliittista juhlimisen kategoriaa määrittelemällä neljä erilaista juhlimispositiota, toisin sanoen, neljä erillistä kannabiksen käytön tarkoituspäätä erillisine kulutuskäytäntöineen. Näiden positioiden nimet ovat Progressiivinen, Puristi, Hedonisti ja Optimoija. Progressiivinen juhlii kannabista sosiaalisesti edistyksekkäänä välineenä; Puristi juhlii kannabiksen kykyä perusteellisesti muuttaa tavanomaista ajatuksen kulkua; Hedonisti juhlii kannabiksen kykyä upottaa käyttäjä luonnostaan nautinnollisiin huveihin; Optimoija juhlii kannabiksen suorituskykyä parantavia ominaisuuksia. Myös kaksi näiden positioiden yhdistelmää tunnistetaan. Nämä ovat Uskonnollinen omistautuminen, jossa kannabis saavuttaa syvän merkityksen yksilön elämässä; ja Kannabis taikuus, jossa käytännölliset motiivit kannabiksen käytölle tieteen tahtoen yhdistetään esteettisiin ja tunneperäisiin motiiveihin. Juhlistamispositioilla näytetään olevan erilaisia ja välillä kahdenkeskisesti toisiaan vastustavia kulutuspäitä. Juhlistamispositioiden välisiä suhteita havainnollistetaan semioottisen neliön avulla. Kulutusnarratiivien analyysi näyttää miten kuluttajat muodostavat kulutuskäytäntöjä saavuttaakseen kullekin positiolle kuuluvan halutun kulutuspäämäärän. Tulokset viittaavat siihen, että kannabiksen käyttäjien ja heidän tarkoituseriensä sijoittaminen yhteen kategoriaan on puutteellinen kannabiksen kulutukseen liittyvien ilmiöiden kokonaisvaltaiseen ymmärtämiseen. Laillisilla kannabismarkkinoilla kulttuurin välittäjien pohditaan näyttelevän roolia kannabiksen kulutuksen legitimoimisessa sekä uusien tarpeiden ja halujen tuottamisessa erityisesti niille kuluttajille, jotka ovat pimeiden markkinoiden ulottumattomissa.

Avainsanat Kulutuskulttuuri, Kannabis, Self-Help, Kulttuurin välittäjät, Diskurssianalyysi

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Introduction

Cannabis is by far the most used illicit drug worldwide with an estimate of 250 million users (Elflein 2020). However, the illicit status is being extensively contested. Investors' bets are mounting on softening regulations for an increasing number of countries (Boyde 2021), Germany being the latest to announce its plans to allow the sale of cannabis for recreational purposes (Rodriguez 2021). Global cannabis market's estimated growth from around \$25 billion in 2021 to \$176 billion in 2030 (Business Wire 2022) has prompted investors to use the ecstatic term "Green Rush."

Yet, analyses of cannabis culture continue to remain sparse (Holm et al. 2013; cf. Sandberg 2012). The recently legalized cannabis markets in the U.S. have prompted a multitude of research approaches from consumer researchers, but they do not chiefly address cannabis culture itself (e.g. Huff et al. 2021; Cormack & Cosgrave 2021; Kjellberg & Olson 2016). Prior to legalization, studies on cannabis use have tended to focus on stigma (e.g. Becker 1966; Hathaway et al. 2011; Hathaway 2004; Sandberg 2011). Indeed, cannabis has a colorful history as a morally divisive consumption object (e.g. Booth 2003).

The positive meanings attached to cannabis use have gained less attention (Holm et al. 2013; Holm et al. 2015; cf. Sandberg 2011; Sandberg 2012), even after legalization (cf. Huff et al. 2021). This is despite the fact that the array of benefits and celebratory meanings attached to cannabis use is conspicuously rich. The medicinal benefits of cannabis have been shown to be "paving the way for a broader liberalisation" (The Economist 2019; see also Stringer & Maggard 2016), but the glorification of cannabis is far from restrained to medical discourses (e.g. Sandberg 2011; 2012; Holm et al. 2013; Holm et al. 2015; Huff et al. 2021). Cannabis advocates advertise benefits including, but not limited to, pain management, better metabolism, improved sleep, steamier sex life, increased empathy, enhanced creativity, happiness, euphoria, and spiritual enlightenment. A call has been issued to investigate these positive meanings since they have been found to be a significant precursor for cannabis use (Holm et al. 2015; Holm et al. 2013).

The purpose of this thesis is to extend Sandberg's (2011; 2012) research on the cannabis cultural discourse by focusing specifically on the positive meanings attached to cannabis

use, that is, *the celebratory discourses of cannabis consumption*. In his work, however, Sandberg (2011) focuses particularly on users' creative efforts to *evade stigma* with celebratory assertions. Thus, his research does not deeply investigate the different ways of celebrating cannabis use but rather clumps them into a monolithic category. This thesis extends Sandberg's (2011; 2012) work first, by identifying *four distinct celebratory positions* with distinct consumption purposes and practices and second, by investigating the *relations between these celebratory positions* which users express in their consumption narratives and descriptions of ideal consumption practices.

A discourse analysis is conducted on six *cannabis self-help books* situated in the context of legal cannabis use in the U.S. The empirical materials have been chosen to specifically foreground (Arnould et al. 2006) celebratory cannabis discourses. In the tradition of Consumer Culture Theory (CCT), cannabis self-help books are approached as mass-mediated texts and products of the cultural production system which "invite consumers to covet certain identity and lifestyle ideals" (Arnould & Thompson 2005, 875). In this genre, the author's role as a cultural intermediary (Bourdieu 1984; Cronin 2004; Negus 2002; Maguire & Matthews 2012) is to construct cannabis use as a legitimate form of consumption, convey how cannabis use is perceived by others and educate consumers in a way that allows them to develop a positive relationship to cannabis by offering their lifestyles as depictions of ideal consumer types.

In the first section of the Findings, I identify four celebratory positions – that is, four distinct cannabis consumption purposes with distinct consumption practices – that I term *the Progressive, the Purist, the Hedonist, and the Optimizer*. In the second section, I illustrate the relations between these distinct and sometimes mutually exclusive celebratory positions with the help of the semiotic square (Greimas 1987; in consumer research e.g. Kozinets 2008; Humphreys 2010; Floch 1988). In other words, I show that there exist contradictory purposes for cannabis consumption which are coupled with distinct consumption practices.

The primary contribution of this thesis is the development of understanding about how cannabis use is celebrated (Sandberg 2011; Sandberg 2012; Holm et al. 2013; Holm et al. 2015). The analysis shows how the four distinct celebratory positions frame consumers' "horizons of conceivable action, feeling, and thought" (Arnould & Thompson 2005, 896). Sandberg's (2011; 2012) research on celebration is also extended by analyzing the cannabis

consumption narratives in the context of legal cannabis use. Secondly, this thesis contributes to consumer research regarding the under researched area of narcotics consumption (e.g. Goulding et al. 2002; Goulding et al. 2009; also Strömberg 2008). Cannabis consumption is shown to extend beyond the realm of recreation and leisure (ibid.). Cannabis consumption narratives involve deeply spiritual experiences, miraculous medical recoveries, and instances of improved bodily capabilities. Consumers imbue cannabis with special powers which they unleash during magical consumption experiences (e.g. Arnould et al. 1999). The sacrament of cannabis consumption is also narrated to give shape to distinct consumption communities (e.g. Schouten & McAlexander 1995; Kozinets 2001). The result of this thesis is a description of the interlinked ways that cannabis use is celebrated in the cannabis cultural discourse. The role of cultural intermediaries in celebration is discussed.

Literature Review

The literature review consists of two parts. The first part sets the context by briefly summarizing the major historical developments regarding cannabis use and its peculiarly intense symbolic involvement in the American socio-political landscape during the past century. The second part itself consists of two parts and reviews previous research on cannabis culture. First, I review Sandberg's (2012; 2011) research on cannabis culture prior to legalization and explain the notion of *celebratory cannabis discourse* which this thesis expands. Second, I review more recent consumer research by Huff et al. (2021) situated within the *legal* recreational cannabis markets in the U.S. This research indicates that cannabis products are now being attached with meanings that are absent in Sandberg's (2012; 2011) research, and which run counter to the "traditional," countercultural values of cannabis culture.

Cannabis and the Past Century

Cannabis has a peculiarly rich history (Booth 2003). And although cannabis advocates tend to emphasize the marginalized "countermemories" (Lipsitz 1990; Thompson 2004) of cannabis being used for many millennia, by many people, in many beneficial ways (e.g.

Herer & Cabarga 1998 aka the “Hemp Bible”), the following summary takes into account only the major developments during the past century. The historical review points to four major influences that have had a notable effect on the attitudes and conceptions about cannabis and cannabis users. These major influences are

- (1) the initial demonization of cannabis and cannabis users, particularly of those belonging to ethnic minorities (c. 1910’s) (e.g. Booth 2003; Bonnie & Whitehead 1970; Musto 1972; Becker 1966),
- (2) the adoption of cannabis use by the 1960’s countercultural movements and their increasingly white and rich population (c. 1960’s) (e.g. Booth 2003; Sandberg 2012; Chomsky 1998),
- (3) news media’s increasingly positive spin on the medicinal benefits of cannabis, and the legalization of medical cannabis (c. 1990’s) (e.g. MacLionis & Gerber 2010, 201; Stringer & Maggard 2016), and
- (4) the legalization of recreational cannabis and the legalized market’s concomitant innovation of new cannabis products (c. 2010’s) (e.g. Huff et al. 2021).

Cannabis use has travelled in lockstep with non-conformity throughout the past century (Booth 2003; Sandberg 2012). There is a wide consensus that the initial criminalization of cannabis use – put in effect in 1937 – was a deliberate effort to create an instrument of power to target the “renegade” demographic of cannabis users which initially consisted of Mexican immigrants (e.g. Booth 2003; Bonnie & Whitehead 1970; Becker 1966; Musto 1972). Cannabis and other drug laws in the U.S. have been – and continue to be – disproportionately enforced against non-whites (Earp et al. 2021).

During the 1960’s, cannabis use became more widespread (Gallup 2020) notably among the increasingly white and rich population taking part in the anti-war and hippie movements (Booth 2003; Chomsky 1998). The roots of cannabis culture run deep in these countercultural movements which followed the Civil Rights Movement (Sandberg 2012; Booth 2003). The music of The Beatles, The Rolling Stones, Jimi Hendrix, Bob Dylan and many others was the bugle call and “marijuana was the battle flag” (also the literal flag of the Youth International Party aka the Yippies) leading towards a cultural revolution (Booth 2003, 234). Booth (2003, 244) recalls that in the 1960’s “[t]he drug was no longer regarded just as a cause for criminality but also associated with a dissolute and un-American lifestyle.”

In his sociological theorizing on deviance, Becker (1966) finds “a marihuana user” to be an exemplary of a deviant label that marks the boundary between “Us” and *the outsiders*. Sandberg (2012) notes that the rituals, symbols and stories which comprise cannabis culture have remained “relatively stable” throughout the West since the 1960’s. Interestingly, the countercultural movements’ oppositional attitudes have travelled along (ibid.). Sandberg (2012) states that cannabis culture’s oppositionality towards modern society is perhaps its most essential characteristic, a notion which he identifies in the “role-playing” attached to the practice of cannabis consumption as well.

During the 1990’s, the attitudes of the U.S. population started to shift due to the media’s positive reframing of cannabis as a medicine rather than as a component of the drug war (Stringer & Maggard 2016; on media frames see Humphreys & Latour 2013). Cannabis was, in a word, *medicalized* (MacIonis and Gerber 2010). Cannabis could now be discussed through “the language of the system” which retained a more “serious” and “professional” discourse protected by the legitimacy of medical research (Pedersen & Sandberg 2012, 7). The category of “a cannabis user” started to transform from a moral and legal deviance into a medical condition, and the conception of cannabis use started to transform from a criminal activity into a treatment (MacIonis and Gerber 2010, 201; Stringer & Maggard 2016).

Regulative legitimacy (e.g. Johnson et al. 2006; Humphreys 2010; Huff et al. 2021) was initially attained when California became the first state to legalize medical cannabis in 1996 and 35 other states have followed since. In 2012 Colorado and Washington became the first states to legalize the sale of recreational cannabis products. 16 other states have followed and the number is expected to grow (Huff et al. 2021). Medical use continues to be generally more acceptable for the American public than recreational use: currently 91% of the adult population in the U.S. approve the legal use of cannabis for medical purposes whereas 31% support *only* medical use but not recreational use (Van Green 2021; Gallup 2020). Consequently, recreational cannabis retailers continuously seek alignments with medical and therapeutic discourses to attain legitimacy and larger markets (Huff et al. 2021).

Previous Research on Cannabis Culture

The peculiarly deviant and unlawful history of cannabis use has undoubtedly prompted researchers to focus on the stigma attached to cannabis use (e.g. Hathaway et al. 2011; Hathaway 2004; Sandberg 2011; Becker 1966). This thesis, however, backgrounds the notion of stigma and chooses to focus explicitly on *how cannabis use is celebrated* (e.g. Sandberg 2012; Sandberg 2011; Pedersen & Sandberg 2012). Whereas Sandberg's (2012; 2011) work has been published in journals concerned primarily with public health and crime, this thesis inspects the celebratory narratives of cannabis consumption phenomena predominantly from a consumer research perspective. Moreover, Sandberg's (2011; 2012) research context is *illegal* cannabis use in Norway while this thesis inspects legal cannabis use in the U.S. However, Sandberg (2012; 2011) emphasizes that cannabis culture has remained "relatively stable" throughout the West since its dispersion from the 1960's countercultural movements. Although Sandberg's (2012; 2011) work is not strictly consumer research, his work on the celebratory meanings attached to cannabis use functions as the main body of literature which this thesis aims to extend.

Previous consumer research on drug use is scarce. A notable exception is the research by Goulding et al. (2009; also Goulding et al. 2002) which inspects ecstasy use in the context of a night club. The consumption of a more common and legal narcotic, alcohol, has been approached as a way to induce communal bonds through the shared pleasures of consumption (Banister & Piacentini 2008; Wright et al. 2016). A common element between these studies is their interest in the role of shared narcotics consumption in causing *communitas*, a temporary, non-hierarchical community that emerges between people who become disengaged from their ordinary selves during extraordinary experiences (Turner 1969; elsewhere in consumer research e.g. Arnould & Price 1993; Kozinets 2002; Belk et al. 1989).

Celebratory Discourses in Cannabis Culture

Becker (1966) noted early on that the taste for the (deviant) pleasures of cannabis is always socially acquired and continues to have a social character even when performed in solitude.

Culture provides individuals with the tools to recognize and ultimately enjoy the drug's effects (ibid.). Sandberg (2012) adopts a conception of culture as a "tool kit" (Swidler 1986); cannabis culture is a collection of rituals, symbols and stories which the users refer to in order to make sense of cannabis consumption phenomena in their lives. Sandberg (2011) focuses particularly on how users utilize the "tool kit's" symbolic resources to renegotiate stigmatic associations about cannabis users. The individual's *habitus* (Bourdieu 1984) sets limits to the creative use of symbolic resources. This thesis assumes the prevalent view that in contemporary society the marketplace functions as the predominant source of symbolic resources which consumers use to make sense of consumption phenomena and their lives (Arnould & Thompson 2005).

In his research, Sandberg (2011; 2012) identifies three discursive repertoires in the tool kit of cannabis culture which cannabis users utilize – according to his interpretation – to predominantly negotiate and resolve stigmatic associations attached to their cannabis use. These discursive repertoires are termed (1) normalization (i.e. "cannabis use is normal," "cannabis users are normal"), (2) neutralization/risk denial (i.e. "I'm not like the other users," "I am a sensible user," "cannabis is not as dangerous as...") (see also Peretti-Watel 2003; Sykes & Matza 1957), and (3) celebration, which emphasizes the positive values attached to cannabis use. Due to the predominant focus on users' efforts to evade stigma, Sandberg's (2011; also 2012) research clumps cannabis users' celebratory repertoires into a single, monolithic category. The celebratory repertoires, where users emphasize the *positive* meanings about cannabis use and users, are in Sandberg's (2011) research contrasted with normalizing and neutralizing repertoires which are essentially efforts to evade *negative* meanings attached to cannabis use (Sandberg 2011). In this thesis, the different ways that users are seen to celebrate cannabis use are *not* interpreted predominantly as efforts to cover an admitted possession of a stigma. Instead, celebratory assertions are approached primarily as meaningful consumption narratives about cannabis use. Although there is a likely agenda to evade stigma, this thesis assumes an approach that backgrounds this aspect in order to attain novel insights (see Arnould et al. 2006).

A celebratory discursive repertoire about cannabis use is a type of positive narrative or assertion about cannabis use which users enthusiastically refer to (Sandberg 2011; 2012). For example, when Sandberg (2011, 377) asked his interviewees about their reasons for cannabis use, they answered: [i]t makes you happy," "[h]ash makes you more peaceful," "it

gets creative thoughts going,” it is “mildly spiritual” etc. While all the above can be counted as common celebratory narratives in cannabis culture (see also Findings), Sandberg’s (2011; 2012) research emphasizes the prevalence of three closely interlinked celebratory elements which are ubiquitous in users’ celebratory narratives. These are (1) naturality, (2) oppositionality towards modern society and (3) authenticity (Sandberg 2011; Sandberg 2012; also Pedersen & Sandberg 2012). To be noted, cannabis culture owes greatly to the American countercultural movements of the 1960’s which also involve these characteristics (e.g. Sandberg 2012; Booth 2003).

Firstly, cannabis is a “green herb, and it grows in the wild” (Sandberg 2012, 70). Cannabis culture’s key symbol – the green cannabis leaf – is inextricably linked to the cultural category of “nature” and “natural” (Sandberg 2012). Users’ enthusiastically emphasize that cannabis is indeed “organic” and “a natural product” (Sandberg 2012; 2011). Consequently, other “natural” drugs such as magic mushrooms are espoused, while “chemical” drugs such as cocaine and amphetamine are not (Sandberg 2012). The “naturality” of cannabis ready for consumption is retained through its rawness and close resemblance to the cannabis growing in the wild (ibid.). This positively differentiates it from modern pharmaceuticals and “chemicals” (Pedersen & Sandberg 2012; Sandberg 2012). According to Sandberg (2012, 74), the boundary between chemical and natural in cannabis culture “can be interpreted as embedded in a larger moral and cultural opposition between nature and culture, or as a criticism of modern society” (LSD makes a notable exception to this since it is both visibly “chemical” and embraced by counterculture (Booth 2003)).

Secondly, Sandberg (2012; 2011) proposes that perhaps the most essential characteristics of cannabis culture and the “role-playing” attached to cannabis consumption is its oppositionality towards modern culture. Cannabis culture is deeply rooted in the values of the 1960’s American countercultural movements which were against conformity to modern society’s conventions (Sandberg 2012). Kozinets (2008, 869-70) categorizes the “beatniks, hippies, downshifters, voluntary simplistics, greens [and] ecofeminists” to the Green Luddite ideology, which finds “technological development as destructive of nature and authentic ways of life.” It is this same group that has embraced the naturality and authenticity of cannabis (Sandberg 2012).

Since the 1960's, cannabis culture has become hybridized with an array of subcultures and scenes which share the feature of oppositionality towards the "mainstream" modern society, such as hip-hop scenes, Rastafarianism, surfing and skateboarding scenes etc. (Sandberg 2012; Booth 2003). What Sandberg (2011; 2012) finds peculiar is the users' emphasis on how positively *different* cannabis users are from non-users since these assertions are paradoxically coupled with assertions about cannabis users' "normality" (ibid.). In other words, it seems that users do not feel like cannabis culture is an all-encompassing feature of their lives. However, Sandberg (2012, 75) convincingly shows that "a kind of ordered or organized difference is fundamental for the symbolic meaning of the drug." In other words, the playful routines of cannabis consumption are organized around their oppositionality towards modern society (Sandberg 2012; see also Strömberg 2008). Sandberg (2011; 2012) thus rejects the idea that "normalization" is a meaningful way to describe contemporary cannabis consumption phenomena, despite the increase of use and the undeniable trend towards more liberal attitudes about cannabis use. Moreover, users often seem inclined to tune down the potency of cannabis as a symbol of cultural difference by, for example, emphasizing how they do *not* wear batik clothing and are indeed *not* hippies (Sandberg 2011; 2012).

The final point of celebration, authenticity, may be linked to the celebrated mind-altering properties of cannabis. Cannabis users often celebrate the fact cannabis use allows them to be themselves somehow even more than without cannabis (Sandberg 2011; 2012). Sandberg (2011, 377) notes how users tend to emphasize how cannabis allows them to "find themselves" and focus on the "important stuff," while conversely making them more critical and daring towards the "dull mainstream." Users emphasize that cannabis is used by "free-thinking, open people" (Sandberg 2012, 64) while many consider themselves anarchist (Sandberg 2011). Respondents also sometimes draw causal links between the mind-altering properties of cannabis and their opposition towards modern society (Sandberg 2011). One respondent stated that cannabis had positively and permanently altered the way he saw the world, a consequence he attributed to be an effect of cannabis use itself but also of its illegal status (Sandberg 2011, 377). Especially anti-drug authorities are considered myopic, dogmatic and propagandist (Sandberg 2012).

Tensions in the Legal Cannabis Markets

Recently, Huff et al. (2021) have inspected how the material properties of objects – in this case the packages of recreational cannabis products – influence their legitimacy. They choose recreational cannabis as a substantive context for their research since it is a contested consumption object, the meanings of which are currently in “a state of flux” and under active negotiation by consumers and retailers (Huff et al. 2021, 26). However, the research does not primarily contribute to the understanding of different ways of celebrating cannabis use, which is pertinent for this thesis, nor does their research touch on the actual *consumption* of the inspected products. Rather, they focus on how retailers can attain legitimacy and larger market potential by utilizing recreational cannabis products’ material and expressive capacities to construct alignments with legitimate meanings (i.e. medicine, technology, modern society) and to create distance to illegitimate ones (i.e. intoxication, the black market). Due to their focus on legitimacy, there continues to exist a gap in consumer research about the different ways cannabis use is celebrated.

The research by Huff et al. (2021) nevertheless offers a lens to the meanings which consumers and retailers attach to *legal recreational cannabis products* in comparison to illegal cannabis (Sandberg 2011; 2012). This concerns particularly the new cannabis products’ alignments with the values of a technologically advanced modern society (Huff et al. 2021). Indeed, technology, the main driver of contemporary economies, has now become interwoven with this realm of human endeavor as well (Kozinets 2008). The legal cannabis markets have brought quality control, standardization and product development to a level that was unattainable for the black market alone (Huff et al. 2021). Cannabis – the leafy green – has gotten besides it vape pens, patches, tinctures, capsules and even suppositories that mimic the properties of pharmaceutical products and other “known, legitimate” consumer technologies (Huff et al. 2021, 36).

Huff et al. (2021) show that cannabis consumers have differing reactions to these technologically advanced recreational cannabis products. For example, Karen, a novice 44-year-old recreational cannabis consumer associates the packages with mainstream grocery stores and other legitimate companies; a vape pen is associated with something that she might find “at the Mac Store” (Huff et al. 2021, 37). She appreciates the fact that these products align with the values of a modern society (Huff et al. 2021). Meanwhile, Danielle,

an “expert consumer,” finds these associations problematic. Danielle describes the products as “touristy,” “too produced,” and as something that she “[doesn’t] actually trust in a weird way” (Huff et al. 2021, 42). Technological properties in cannabis products mark a departure from the image of a green plant growing in the wild – an image that symbolizes cannabis culture’s valuation of nature above all (Sandberg 2012). It is reasonable to suggest that Danielle “[doesn’t] actually trust” these products “in a weird way” because they express an alignment with modern society’s mechanizing and alienating tendencies which threaten to strip cannabis from its countercultural, natural, and authentic meanings which are important to her identity (see also Leung et al. 2018). As Sandberg (2012) notes, no other drug culture celebrates the image of the substance’s raw material quite the same as cannabis culture does.

Although the focus of the research by Huff et al. (2021) is on legitimation instead of celebration, their research does hint towards the fact that consumers may be enthusiastic about cannabis use but for different reasons which may be even mutually opposite to each other as shown above. Thus, there is good reason to re-examine the category of “celebration” (e.g. Sandberg 2011; Holm et al. 2013; Holm et al. 2015) if we are to further understand cannabis consumption phenomena.

Summary of the Literature Review

Consumer Culture Theory (CCT) takes notice of how cultural conceptions (i.e. ideology, discourse, mythology) frame consumers’ lives and incline them towards certain patterns of behavior and sense-making in their unique lives (Arnould & Thompson 2005, 896). Sandberg’s (2011; 2012) research indicates particularly an oppositional framing related to cannabis consumption. Sandberg (2012) emphasizes that some type of oppositionality – particularly towards modern society and culture – is fundamental to the “role-playing” involved in the consumption of cannabis. The rituals, stories and symbols which comprise cannabis culture also emphasize naturality and authenticity in accordance with the 1960’ counterculture (Sandberg 2012; Booth 2003). However, Sandberg (2011; 2012) notes that cannabis users do not ubiquitously identify with the oppositional disposition of cannabis culture, but rather fervently maintain that they are “normal” people despite their cannabis use (ibid.). In other words, although cannabis users find themselves to be responsible members of society in their ordinary lives, the playful routines of cannabis consumption

seem to incline users to adopt an oppositional stance towards modernity at least temporarily but sometimes also permanently (Sandberg 2012; 2011). Indeed, cannabis users enthusiastically referred to their cannabis-induced personal transformations and “spiritual” experiences which they felt also marked them as positively culturally different from the non-using mainstream (ibid.).

More recent research on the U.S.’ legal cannabis markets (Huff et al. 2021) suggests that recreational cannabis products are being associated with new meanings, some of which run counter to the characteristics of cannabis culture inspected by Sandberg (2012). This further suggests a need to expand the monolithic category of celebration (Sandberg 2011; 2012). This thesis expands Sandberg’s (2011; 2012) work first, by identifying four distinct purposes and practices of cannabis consumption referred to as *celebratory positions*, and second, by investigating how the relations between these distinct and sometimes opposing celebratory positions are expressed in consumption narratives and practices.

Materials and Methods

The empirical analysis in this thesis involves a discourse analysis (Moisander & Valtonen 2006) of six books from a genre of literature termed *cannabis self-help*. These books have been chosen to foreground (Arnould et al. 2006) *celebratory cannabis discourses* (Sandberg 2011; 2012). Furthermore, the possible novel celebratory meanings attached to *legal cannabis use* are of particular interest for this thesis – although not the solitary – since Sandberg’s (2012; 2011) research is situated in the context of illegal cannabis use. The chosen empirical materials have been published between 2017-2020, and as such, they are situated within the context of legal cannabis use in the U.S.

Empirical Materials

The authors of the empirical materials are approached as cultural intermediaries who essentially function as mediators between producers and consumers through the production of needs (e.g. Bourdieu 1984; Cronin 2004; Negus 2002; Maguire & Matthews 2012). What

cultural intermediaries “do” is construct value and provide knowledge about consumption goods (i.e. material goods, services, ideas and behaviors) for consumers to navigate the complex cultural field in which the cultural intermediaries claim expertise (Maguire & Matthews 2012). By offering their lifestyles as ideal forms of consumption and by claiming authority within their specific fields, cultural intermediaries give their definitions on what kind of consumption and lifestyle is tasteful, desirable, and worthy of aspiration, while also qualifying what is not (Bourdieu 1984). Cultural intermediaries simultaneously struggle to legitimize and “intellectualise” their domains as legitimate areas of expertise (Cronin 2004, 350-1), particularly since the “professionalism” of their occupations may rely largely on personal disposition (Maguire & Matthews 2012). For example, the books *Weed Mom* and *A Woman’s Guide to Cannabis* exemplify a variation of cannabis’ cultural consumption where the credibility of the authors relies largely on their personal dispositions (i.e. an abstinent and skeptical mother turned into a cannabis using parent; a lawyer turned into the “cannabis lifestyle” and cannabis retail).

The cannabis experts offer their “how to improve your life” –formulations about cannabis consumption in the form of an authoritative guide that resembles the genre of self-help (e.g. Philip 2009; McGinn 2005; Rimke 2000), hence the ad hoc term *cannabis self-help*. Although self-help literature or “bibliotherapy” has been used by clinicians as a therapeutic tool to overcome, for instance, depression (Philip 2009), critical research has characterized the literature of this genre as an “apparatus of governance” that encourages individuals to voluntarily transform and govern themselves “in culturally prescribed ways” to achieve a better life with the help of the self-help expert’s knowledge (Rimke 2000, 73, 69). The books are approached as mass-mediated cultural texts that convey “unadulterated marketplace ideologies” and “ideal consumer types” (Arnould & Thompson 2005, 875). Although CCT does not approach consumers as “dupes,” but rather as “interpretive agents” (ibid.) who actively defy conformity and subversion to corporate power (Thompson and Haytko 1997; Kozinets 2002), self-help literature tends to effectively mask the endeavor for self-change, self-development and individuality as a “natural” and “free” undertaking by encouraging individuals to “rely exclusively on oneself” while paradoxically making the reader rely exclusively on the expert’s advice (Rimke 2000, 62; McGee 2005). Self-help books’ emancipatory articulations and promises may on a closer look merely replace an old system of government with its own (Mikkonen et al. 2013).

“A cannabis self-help book” is a naturally occurring empirical material and a market-mediated cultural text that is a product of the discourse of cannabis culture (see Hall 1997; Moisander & Valtonen 2006). In accordance with the self-help genre (e.g. Philip 2009; McGinn 2005; Rimke 2000), “cannabis self-help” offers its readers knowledge about the different ways of attaining personal growth, fulfillment, a more productive life, and ultimately, a happier life with the aid of cannabis. As such, the empirical materials should *not* be treated as “transparent representations or accurate portrayals of marketplace phenomena” but rather as “particular accounts of those phenomena” (Moisander & Valtonen 2006, 68). The empirical materials were picked up from Amazon’s online bookstore (Table 1). Of particular interest were cultural and social aspects and in general the human activity attached to cannabis use. The topic of the empirical materials was to ideally revolve around questions about “why” and “how” people use cannabis, while leaving topics about the substance itself to the background.

Analytical Process and Interpretive Procedures

An iterative, back and forth reading strategy between the empirical materials and previous research was adopted for the analytical process (Moisander & Valtonen 2006; Thompson & Haytko 1997). The data showed that cannabis users indeed have many different consumption goals. For the purpose of positive spiritual and personal transformation, the narratives emphasized the importance of constructing consumption settings external to modern culture and everyday life responsibilities. In performance enhancement use, the users paid attention to the dose and quality of cannabis and established the contexts in which cannabis use indeed enhanced performance. Furthermore, these two types of consumption seemed to be mutually exclusive. In the first type, the emphasis of celebration was on the exceptional capacity of cannabis to dissolve “societal dogmas” and unhealthy patterns in the individual’s life, while in the second type, the emphasis was on cannabis’ potential in assisting users to be even more responsible, efficient and productive workers, parents and citizens than they would be without cannabis. In the first type of use, the overwhelming effects of cannabis were celebrated, whereas in the second type of use, and in contradiction, the ability to control and predict the effects was celebrated. Distinct consumption practices are shown to preserve these celebrated yet mutually contradictory effects.

Table 1: Data set

Title and Year of Publication	Pages	Main Theme(s)	Description
<i>The Cannabis Apothecary</i> (2020)	241	Lifestyle, Aesthetics, Wellness	A coffee table book filled with photographic content and cannabis recipes. Focuses on cannabis and lifestyle.
<i>Cannabis and Spirituality</i> (2017)	274	Spirituality	A total of 18 authors give accounts of the sacramental/spiritual uses of cannabis in different traditions. Gives guidance on incorporating cannabis with spiritual practices. The ideological content leans heavily towards the countercultural ideals of the 1960's.
<i>Cannabis for Couples</i> (2020)	213	Relationships, Spirituality	A guide to intimate bonding with the help of cannabis use and spiritual practice. The author draws heavily on Eastern religious teachings, much in the same key as hippies did during the 1960's (Booth 2003).
<i>The Little Book of Cannabis</i> (2018)	231	Wellness, Medicine	Oriented mostly on health, wellness and scientific research. Chapters are titled along the lines of "Improving Sleep," "Decreasing Stress and Anxiety," "Boosting Mood and Creativity." Gives accounts of historical uses cannabis and advice on uses based on recent scientific research.
<i>Weed Mom</i> (2019)	287	Parenting, Wellness, Lifestyle	A guide directed at women and moms. Takes explicit stances on the social conundrums that cannabis-using moms tackle with.
<i>A Woman's Guide to Cannabis</i> (2018)	218	Wellness, Beauty, Lifestyle	Gives advice for women on how to "get high like a lady," and to get the most out of cannabis for beauty, health, and recreation.

The empirical materials also indicated differing consumption practices and contexts for the medical and recreational use of cannabis, the former situated within everyday life and the latter set apart from it into the realm of play. Also, a special consumption practice was

inspected that combines recreational use with healthy activities. This practice was in emic terms referred to as “self-care” or “cannabis self-care” and had the qualities of play (Huizinga 1950, 13) with the exception that the practice had the *material end* of improved wellbeing for the individual.

The iterative, back and forth reading strategy between the data and previous research resulted in the identification of *four distinct celebratory positions*, that is, four distinct purposes for cannabis consumption coupled with distinct practices. The celebratory positions were termed the Progressive, the Purist, the Hedonist, and the Optimizer. The positions will be explicated in the first section of the Findings.

The Semiotic Square

The second section of the Findings inspects the relations and tensions between the four celebratory positions. The semiotic square (Figure 1) was adopted as a tool for analysis. It also functions as a map for the Findings section that illustrates the relations between the positions. The semiotic square (Greimas 1987; in consumer research e.g. Kozinets 2008; Humphreys 2010; Floch 1988) is a way to visually represent how meaning is perceived and produced within a discourse. In previous consumer research, Humphreys (2010) uses the semiotic square to illustrate the historical development of casino gambling into a legitimate form of entertainment by analyzing its meanings in newspaper articles; Kozinets (2008) uses the semiotic square to illustrate the ideological field of technology consumption.

The strength of the semiotic square is its capacity to “organize a conceptual universe coherently” whether real or fictional, rational or irrational (Floch 1988, 239). As such, Figure 1 is an attempt to organize and map the totality of celebratory meanings attached to cannabis use within the cannabis cultural discourse. The semiotic square “anticipates” (rather than predicts or determines) “the ways that meaning may follow” and the “meaning[s] which are logically present but not yet in force” (ibid.). Participants in the cannabis cultural discourse use the relations between the positions as tools to frame their arguments and to further their agendas, although they should not be assumed to be shared necessarily by all people (see Humphreys 2010).

The semiotic square illustrates how meaning is produced within a discourse through the identification of two distinct types of oppositional relations that are fundamental to language use: *contradiction and contrariety* (Floch 1988). A final relation, *complementarity*, denotes the operation of implication.

Contradiction between positions denotes that the existence of one position presupposes the absence of another. If X is true, then not-X is false, and vice versa. Existence of both X and not-X constitutes a paradox, indicating ambiguity within the discourse (e.g. Mick & Fournier 1998). The semiotic square (Figure 1) shows that there is a *contradiction of standards* between the Purist and the Optimizer. The Purist uses cannabis to overwhelm her subjectivity to gain access to deeper truths. Cannabis use allows the Purist to recognize internalized dogmas which inhibit the attainment of her full potential. The Optimizer, on the other hand, aims to control and predict her cannabis use to achieve improved performance. The overwhelming effects – which are sought by the Purist – threaten the Optimizer’s pursuit to bend cannabis’ forces towards improved performance. The Purist and the Optimizer thus use cannabis in mutually exclusive ways, revealing a contradiction of standards. The semiotic square also shows that there is a *contradiction of individualism* between the Progressive and the Hedonist. The Progressive celebrates cannabis use as a tool for socially progressive ends, whereas the Hedonist celebrates the pleasure cannabis provides for the individual.

Contrariety between positions is more ambiguous since it is possible to have semantic layers between contrary positions, but not between contradictory positions. The semiotic square shows that there is a *contrariety of morality* between the Progressive – who celebrates the socially progressive elements of cannabis use – and the Purist – who celebrates the disruptive elements of cannabis use. In other words, the Progressive and the Purist have contrary views about how cannabis contributes to the collective good. A synthesis between the Progressive and the Purist is “Religious Devotion” which refers to a marked *commitment* to cannabis consumption that deviates from the mainstream culture. This notion is elaborated more in the respective section.

The semiotic square also shows a *contrariety of allurements* between the Optimizer and the Hedonist. This refers to the Optimizer’s pursuit to control cannabis use for the sake of improved performance, whereas the Hedonist surrenders to its pleasures. In other words, the

Optimizer is not “caught up” (Strömberg 2008) by the forces of cannabis but is rather an agentic consumer who transforms cannabis into a tool for her own benefit. The Hedonist, on the other hand, *is* caught up by the pleasurable forces of cannabis which for her facilitate the construction of the realm of play. A synthesis between the Optimizer and the Hedonist is “Cannabis Magic.” In Cannabis Magic, the agentic forces of cannabis and the agency of the consumer meet in a magical relationship where the consumer willingly mixes practical motives with aesthetic and emotional ones (Arnould et al. 1999; also e.g. Belk 1991; Fernandez & Lastovicka 2011; St. James et al. 2011)

Finally, what unites the Progressive and the Optimizer is their conception of cannabis as a tool (i.e. human is the actant), whereas the Purist and the Hedonist consider cannabis as an agent that has the capacity to act on humans (i.e. cannabis is the actant). The two deixis, *complementarity of instrumentality* and *complementarity of detachment* illustrate these relations, respectively. Also, the upper side of the semiotic square shows that the Progressive and the Purist are more collectively oriented. The lower side shows that The Optimizer and the Hedonist are more individualistically oriented.

Findings

In the first section of the Findings, I expand on each of the four celebratory positions. The second part focuses on illuminating the relations between these positions with the help of the semiotic square.

Celebratory Positions

Celebratory position denotes a framing which inclines consumers towards certain patterns of consumption. Celebratory position has a purpose according to which users adopt practices which produce desired consumption goals. The positions are the Progressive, the Purist, the Hedonist, and the Optimizer, and they will be expanded on and delineated from each other in that order.

The Progressive

The Progressive position celebrates the use of cannabis as a *tool* for socially and politically progressive ends. The Progressive is also more *collectively* oriented, meaning that the Progressive celebrates the ways in which cannabis caters for the collective interests of a community. Three main Progressive modes of celebration are identified from the empirical materials: (1) the use of cannabis as a medicine, (2) the use of cannabis as an “exit drug,” and (3) the use of cannabis as a “social drug.” However, the range of “progressive” uses of cannabis is not restricted to these modes, since any cannabis use that benefits the collective wellbeing of a community can be counted as a mode of celebration for the Progressive, especially when supported by scientific research. Medical research in particular gives credence to the insinuation that cannabis use concerns the collective interests of a community consisting of healthy individuals.

Medicinal Cannabis Use

The main expression of the Progressive is the celebration of the medicinal use of cannabis, granted by the legitimacy of scientific research. The following is an excerpt from the introduction section in *The Cannabis Apothecary*. It illuminates the celebrated medicinal benefits of cannabis and proposes cannabis to be an alternative to pharmaceuticals with unpleasant side effects. In addition, the excerpt also hints towards the sheer width of celebrated features and uses of cannabis that are beyond the realm of medicine:

“Cannabis helps me manage both epilepsy and pretty severe depression, allowing me some relief from potent medications that often carry unpleasant side effects, which I’ll get into a bit later. My business partner and daughter-in-law, Mary, loves to take a CBD bath and starts each day with our CBD-infused granola. My son, Nick, enjoys a pre-roll when playing video games, including games on a virtual reality console, which is beyond wild when under the influence.” (The Cannabis Apothecary, x)

The book goes on to give a long list of medical ailments that cannabis may provide treatment for, such as pain relief, spasticity, nausea, decreased appetite, epilepsy, insomnia and other

sleep disorders, rheumatoid arthritis, and anxiety disorders (3also Weed Mom; The Little Book of Cannabis; A Woman’s Guide to Cannabis).

A key talking point in the empirical materials, as well as in Pedersen and Sandberg (2012) is the “naturalness” of cannabis in comparison to modern pharmaceuticals. In Pedersen and Sandberg’s (2012, 6) research, users find the organic, natural cannabis as a healthier alternative to the potentially addictive “red pills with triangles,” as one interviewee exclaimed. Sandberg (2012; 2011) notes that the unprocessed and raw quality of the drug is indeed highly celebrated. The cannabis growing in the wild shares a great resemblance to the cannabis that is ready for consumption. The drug maintains its association with nature through the green color of the plant’s bud which distinguishes it from pharmaceuticals and other “chemicals.” Cannabis is thus often advertised as a “natural” alternative for something else. In the following excerpt “naturalness” is also associated with long tradition:

“Pharmaceutical drugs have certainly become the standard of care, and while it might seem as though cannabis is just emerging as a natural pain reliever, the truth is it’s been used to help manage pain for more than five thousand years.” (The Little Book of Cannabis, 160).

Cannabis as an “Exit Drug”

One peculiar and highly celebrated notion is the potential use of cannabis as an “exit drug.” Throughout cannabis self-help, it is maintained that cannabis can be an effective tool for battling problems with substance abuse (e.g. The Little Book of Cannabis; Weed Mom, 181; Cannabis and Spirituality, 208). The empirical materials portray two distinct modes to “exit” substance abuse with the help of cannabis. The first mode is that cannabis functions as a medical alternative to ineffective medicine and to medicine with have unpleasant side effects. Cannabis is often promoted as a medically legitimate, non-addictive, and “natural” alternative to pain killers. This is a Progressive mode of celebration since it relies on the legitimacy of medical science. The second mode of “exiting” a substance with the help of cannabis is through cannabis’ capacity to augment the individual’s ability to introspect on their complex personal issues with substance abuse. This second mode is beyond the realm of medical science and could be characterized as highly spiritual. Thus, it is not celebrated

by the Progressive who relies on legitimate scientific research. The spiritual mode of “exit” is inspected in the subsequent section on the Purist, who celebrates particularly the revelatory qualities of cannabis. Nevertheless, cannabis users’ exit drug -narratives often include both medicinal and spiritual elements, as will be seen shortly.

The notion of an “exit-drug” has become more relevant along the epidemic of opioid addiction sweeping over the U.S. The books widely maintain that “studies have shown that marijuana provides a safe, non-habit -forming way for people suffering from opioid addiction to kick the habit” (The Cannabis Apothecary, xiii). The empirical materials are full of anecdotal reports from ex-addicts with miraculous recoveries. A “standard version” of a recovery narrative is the story of Siobhan McCarthy, “a lifelong athlete and former national figure skating champion, [who] was the victim of a major car accident that caused severe damage to her leg” (The Little Book of Cannabis, 222). Siobhan went through an intense surgery and became physically addicted to the drugs she was prescribed after being admitted from the hospital. Her doctor suggested cannabis as a treatment:

“While the antidepressants and opiates she had been taking numbed her to emotion, killed her appetite, and subdued her ability to speak up when doctors added yet another medication to her regimen, cannabis not only mitigated the pain in her leg, it also brought a sense of perspective to a mind that had been clouded by years of prescription medication...

...Today, McCarthy is able to manage her pain with cannabis (as she has been doing for the last fifteen years), and she says it’s responsible for more than just providing her with relief from pain and a way out of her addiction. It also helped her access her creativity: since the accident, she’s embarked on a career in both the arts and the cannabis industry, becoming an accomplished playwright, filmmaker, and public relations professional. “Sometimes I wonder how I got through it all. All I can say is, thank God I found cannabis.” (The Little Book of Cannabis, 222-3).

In this narrative, cannabis is celebrated mostly as a progressive medicine for managing pain. Siobhan’s successes in creative endeavors are also hinted to be supported by the properties of cannabis, specifically in comparison to the effects of pharmaceuticals which clouded her mind. This would amount to another mode of celebration for the Progressive. However, there

are also certain elements in Siobhan’s story that attribute benefits to cannabis lying beyond the realm of medical knowledge. For example, cannabis bringing “a sense of perspective to [her] mind” (The Little Book of Cannabis, 222) hints towards the celebration of cannabis-augmented spirituality (see also Sandberg 2011; 2012). More spiritually inclined exit drug - narratives will be inspected further in the section focusing on the Purist.

Cannabis as a “Social Drug”

Another key mode of celebration for the Progressive concerns the use of cannabis as a “social drug.” Indeed, users in Sandberg’s (2011; 2012) frequently maintain that cannabis makes them more sympathetic, relaxed and non-violent, all desirable traits for sociality. These effects are often compared with the more common “social drug,” alcohol (see also Peretti-Watel 2003).

Cannabis is again celebrated as a healthier alternative to alcohol, but also as more responsible. Cannabis is said to be suitable for “smaller, more intimate conversations” since it can “open you up to a greater depth of feeling and connection” (Weed Mom, 219, 225). Cannabis dinner parties are suggested as hangover-free alternatives to wine parties (e.g. A Woman’s Guide to Cannabis, Weed Mom, The Cannabis Apothecary). The fact that cannabis can be enjoyed “without getting wasted” (following excerpt) plays a key part in its appeal. The possibility to socialize and bond with other people is not threatened by the drug’s physical toll (i.e. hangover) but neither by the possibility of temporary moral degradation. These features render cannabis use as a progressive alternative to alcohol consumption:

“Comparing weed to alcohol, Shannon points out how easy it is with cannabis to enjoy yourself without getting wasted, and how, in the right dose, cannabis lacks side effects. ‘If used correctly – that is, not using too much – it makes you feel better. And then it wears off, and that’s it,’ she says. That’s why it’s her go-to for relaxing and for socializing – though she prefers to use cannabis in smaller gatherings where others are also partaking.” (Weed Mom, 216).

“In my opinion, alcohol numbs people, makes them tune out or say and do hurtful things they wouldn’t ordinarily do. Cannabis can open you up to a greater depth of

feeling and connection, and helps you tune in and appreciate the magic in the mundane.’ – Sierra, mom of 2, Massachusetts.” (Weed Mom, 225).

However, the authors do not fail to mention that comparisons between alcohol versus cannabis-induced states of intoxication may be fallacious to begin with (following excerpt). For example, people who do not use alcohol or substances other than cannabis are referred to as “Cali-sober” or “green sober” (Weed Mom, 178), which indicates a disparate and a more favorable categorization for cannabis intoxication:

“Many of us weed moms work in the comparison to alcohol at some point in the conversation. It’s not the perfect analogy, but a framework that most people can wrap their heads around. You can point out that with cannabis, like with alcohol, there’s responsible use and irresponsible use, right and wrong moments to consume. You can talk about how cannabis can be both therapeutic or all about fun, and the ways it contributes to your social life a bit like alcohol, minus the hangover.” (Weed Mom, 227).

“You may have learned not to trust alcohol because it let you down; it separated you from the natural values, virtues, and principles that you know sustain all human relationships on earth. But it’s a big mistake to associate getting drunk with getting high. The muse of marijuana doesn’t aim to get you intoxicated – unless you are compulsively wanting to get stoned to the point that you phase out.” (Cannabis for Couples, 92).

A related issue is the difficulty of putting into words “what it feels like to be high,” which might explain the frequent need to analogize the cannabis high with alcohol intoxication. The notion of the difficulty to describe the cannabis-high is not specifically raised in Sandberg’s (2011; 2012) research. However, Sandberg (2012) identifies the notion of “secret knowledge” in cannabis users’ assertions, a key feature of subcultures where the group members believe that they understand certain things that others do not (Thornton 1995). The following excerpt argues that the effects of cannabis are particularly difficult to describe:

“One of the things that’s so fascinating to me about cannabis is that it is so hard to actually describe what cannabis does,” Walsh says. “What does it feel like?”

Because substances like alcohol or antidepressants have a more direct effect on a specific neurotransmitter system in the brain, he says, it's easier to describe their effects: "Alcohol makes you feel sort of loose, antidepressants make you feel tired, but cannabis? It's definitely a lot harder to nail down." (The Little Book of Cannabis, 80-1)

The heightened bonding along the indescribable and “extraordinary” experience of a shared cannabis high calls forth the notion of *communitas* (Turner 1969). The book *Cannabis for Couples* (e.g. 147) in particular is filled with celebratory narratives about the deeply emotional bonding experiences about couples who “[pulse] to the same core rhythm” and share the same “invisible dimensions” during a shared cannabis high. In previous consumer research, Goulding et al. (2009) note that ravers in a night club may share a mutual “extralinguistic” state that merges them into the collective consciousness of the rave and gives them a sense of spontaneous community beyond mundane social categories. Drug use (Goulding et al. 2009, 763) can be also interpreted as a rite of passage or a pilgrimage (see also Arnould & Price 1993; in the context of alcohol see Banister & Piacentini 2008) where the statuses and ranks of the users’ “normal” everyday selves are left behind. In the context of *illicit* cannabis use the users also leave behind their “law-abiding” selves which furthers the break from the users’ responsible, ordinary selves. The stripping of markers produces an absence of ordinary hierarchical structure which brings the participants into a closer proximity to each other, thus producing *communitas*, a sense of community that emerges between the ritual participants who are mutually disengaged from their ordinary lives and share a common, and perhaps a dangerous experience together (Turner 1969; Arnould & Price 1993; Goulding et al. 2002; Goulding et al. 2009). Shared transformative experiences that induce *communitas* may develop deep, long-lasting bonds between participants (Arnould & Price 1993).

If we continue to assume that cannabis use is a potent marker of divergence from the “mainstream” culture and society (see Sandberg 2012), then it can be suggested that a shared cannabis consumption ritual can mark a departure from everyday life, facilitate *communitas* and thus explain cannabis users’ experiences of heightened sense of bonding. The notion of “cannabis as a social drug” can be counted as a mode of celebration for the Progressive if it is taken to be a healthier and better alternative to, for example, alcohol (for research on

communitas in the context alcohol consumption, see e.g. Banister & Piacentini 2008; Wright et al. 2016).

The Purist

The Purist position celebrates the “original” values of cannabis culture which are strongly rooted in the 1960’s counterculture (Sandberg 2012). The Purist is most readily identified with cannabis culture since she rejects conformity to modern society and holds high standards for naturality and authenticity (Sandberg 2012; 2011). In the following narratives, these elements are intimately interwoven to each other.

As a countercultural, the Purist *celebrates* the fact that cannabis use poses *a threat* to modern society’s dogmatic conventions. This is in contrast to the Progressive, who celebrates cannabis use as a potential means for socially and politically progressive ends. Contrary to progress, the Purist celebrates cannabis’ capacity to help the user identify and *disrupt*, *dismantle*, and *dissolve* dogmatic cultural-cognitive patterns like “authoritarian control,” “grip of the ego” and alike “illusions” which in their essence obstruct access to deeper truth (e.g. Cannabis and Spirituality, Cannabis for Couples). In Purist narratives, anti-authoritarianism and anarchism are closely linked with spiritual discourses (see Sandberg 2012; 2011) due to their common pursuit to dismantle dogma and establish the real truth. Common institutional adversaries named in the empirical materials are organized religions (mostly conservative Christianity), the materialist dogma of consumer capitalism, and the patriarchy (Cannabis and Spirituality; Cannabis for Couples).

Cannabis as an “Amplifier”

For the Purist, the role of cannabis is to function as an “amplifier” of reality (e.g. Cannabis and Spirituality, 68). Other metaphors include a “nonspecific or unspecific amplifier,” and a “magnifier” (Cannabis and Spirituality 15). To paraphrase and summarize this metaphor, the Purist celebrates the fact that cannabis “amplifies” reality due to its inherent capacity to “dissolve” mental filters (i.e. “ego,” “societal dogma” etc.) that frame and separate the individual from “direct” contact with reality. Cannabis creates a “gap” to these filters, and

thus allows the individual to perceive “universal” truths about human nature deep within herself. The “amplifying” effect of cannabis facilitates the individual’s capacity to reach beyond conventional systems of classification and see reality “more fully.” This allows her to recognize and subvert the dogmas of modern culture. The Purist celebrates these revelatory qualities for their own sake, despite the fact that cannabis can sometimes make the individual feel vulnerable and uncomfortable without the “rigidity” provided by societal and cultural conventions.

The amplifier -metaphor is not entirely new, however. Aldous Huxley, a key countercultural figure (e.g. Booth 2003), analogized in his book *The Doors of Perception* (1954) the functioning of his consciousness on mescaline (another psychoactive substance) with a William Blake poem:

“If the doors of perception were cleansed every thing would appear to man as it is, Infinite. For man has closed himself up, till he sees all things thro' narrow chinks of his cavern.”

Huxley argued that mescaline opened the “doors of perception,” a valve that filters reality into consciousness. The “cannabis as an amplifier” -metaphor is consistent with Huxley’s. To borrow Huxley’s words, the Purist celebrates cannabis’ ability to “cleanse” the “doors of perception” and open the valve that lets reality in. Furthermore, the Purist takes the second verse of Blake’s poem to mean that it is in particular the narrow-minded modern man who has closed himself up from reality.

Much like Huxley’s metaphor regarding mescaline, the Purist argues that the reality-augmenting, “amplifying” effect of cannabis results – not from adding anything to reality – but on the contrary, from its capability to dissolve and “create a gap” to mental filters that limit the individual from perceiving “levels of reality not ordinarily perceived” (e.g. Cannabis and Spirituality, 4, 95). The effects are described to be at once “stimulating, amplifying, ego-dissolving” (Cannabis and Spirituality, 95). The result is a more “intuitive” and “direct” connection with reality:

“When we meet cannabis with intention and focus, its ability to clarify and amplify can both shine a light on the illusions we carry and invite us to release into a deeper,

more relaxed, open-hearted presence that feels right and real.” (Cannabis and Spirituality, 68).

“...cannabis can help us dissolve our head-sourced beliefs and relax down into direct and intuitive heart perception and the wisdom of the body...With skillful use, it can help us awaken from the illusion of separateness that has permeated the lives of the vast majority of people in many cultures during a long period of mutual group imprisonment.” (Cannabis and Spirituality, 4).

Kratophany

Notably, the revelatory experiences with cannabis may not be always blissful. The cannabis high can also be highly uncomfortable. It is stated that cannabis use may temporarily induce symptoms descriptive of schizophrenia, and that many people even “seek out and fully enjoy these altered states” (Cannabis for Couples, 34). A true Purist celebrates both the blissful and uncomfortable revelatory experiences for their own sake, since they are nevertheless “true” and “real” aspects of reality which are merely amplified by cannabis:

“People who try marijuana and reject it do so usually because they feel uncomfortable and confused in the altered, fuller consciousness. Instead of life being safely framed by the rigidity of societal dogma, the world becomes unfamiliarly bigger, brighter, more full yet less manageable. More unpredictable and full of mystery.” (Cannabis and Spirituality, 64).

Cannabis is reported to provide an augmented sense of wonder and peace, but it may also augment feelings of fear and anxiety. A manifestation of such ambivalent power is called *kratophany* (Belk et al. 1989). For the person who has had uncomfortable experiences with cannabis, a Purist might refer to the kratophanous quality of cannabis in the following way:

“Cannabis can be a truth serum. If you’re at all sensitive or inner-directed it may pull back the curtain and present you with some insights about your behavior. Even the softening of the heart that can manifest in the cannabis rausch [i.e. high] can elicit a humble look at your missteps and offenses. Another way to put it is that

cannabis can leave you feeling exposed and vulnerable. A lot of people don't like that feeling." (Cannabis and Spirituality, 247).

Instances of kratophany imply a need to adhere to special conduct to maintain the benevolent forces but also to keep the malevolent forces in check (Belk et al. 1989). The Purist locates the source of unpleasant experiences not within the drug but within an inappropriate "set and setting." The set refers to the individual and her history, intentions, and personality that she brings to the consumption experience; the setting, refers to the actual environment where consumption takes place (Cannabis and Spirituality, 17; Cannabis for Couples, 13). The kratophanous cannabis is a source of undeniable, ambivalent and "pure" power; in emic terms, an "amplifier" of experience within a particular set and setting:

"Cannabis can be a mirror of our own minds or consciousness in addition to being an enhancer of whatever "condition our condition is in." Feeling pretty good? Some cannabis can make us feel even better. Feeling bad or sad? Watch out!" (Cannabis and Spirituality, 212).

Accordingly, uncomfortable experiences with cannabis may be attributed to the larger "setting" of an unwell society which cannabis merely amplifies:

"Pot reflects paranoia in a paranoid culture" (Cannabis and Spirituality, 200).

"My own first marijuana experience... began with a sudden ten-minute anxiety attack because I started imagining the police busting in and catching me in the act of something totally illegal and also widely condemned as immoral" (Cannabis for Couples, 33).

In Sandberg's (2012) study, an interviewee argued in a similar manner that paranoia and psychoses did not result from cannabis use itself but rather from its illegal status that makes users anxious and afraid. The interviewee argued that the *real* cause of schizophrenia was actually strict legislation. Sandberg (2011; see also Peretti-Watel 2003; Sykes & Matza 1957) suggests that a repertoire where the order causality is reversed may be interpreted as a "risk denial," which is a way to evade stigma. Another interpretation for these assertions is that cannabis use and cannabis culture are simply *valued* more than abstinence and the

conventions of mainstream culture and society. Graeber (2013, 232) proposes that ontological claims, where something is established as *more real* than something else, can be described as “a kind of a political move” which “tend to be made in the context of competing claims of value.” These claims can be recognized in the attribution of kratophany to cannabis: consciousness on cannabis is described as “altered” but nevertheless “fuller;” reality on cannabis is described with comparative adjectives “bigger,” “brighter” and simply “more.” Cannabis culture and counterculture are frequently claimed to be more in tune with “reality” than the mainstream culture and its myopic anti-drug agenda (see also Sandberg 2012). Graeber (2013, 232-233) proposes that it is only when “universes collide” that it may occur to an individual to establish the status of one universe as *more real* than any other. Here universes collide on contradictory claims regarding whether it is the cannabis users or the abstainers and the anti-drug agenda of contemporary culture which are truly “mad.” Cannabis users can be interpreted to attempt to claim authority to mediate between these two value spheres (Graeber 2013, 232-233) since they argue to possess knowledge of both. Cannabis gives them access to knowledge that is of distant, supernatural, and outside origin (see Sahlins 2013) which is something that abstainers do not possess (see Sandberg 2012).

Beyond Established Thought

“After all, ‘reality,’ if it is to mean anything, must always be that which lies beyond our imaginative constructions, or at the very least, which always contains some properties that extend beyond anything we can think or say about it. That is both undeniable, yet ultimately incomprehensible” (Graeber 2013, 232-3).

Cannabis is celebrated for its capacity to allow the individual to reach beyond ordinary systems of thought. Cannabis is glorified as an aid to recognize “societal dogma” (Cannabis and Spirituality, 64). Cannabis is said to be “inherently subversive to established ways of thought and government” (Cannabis and Spirituality, 194). The Purist celebrates these properties, for they allow her to realize and resist the dogmas of restrictive institutions:

“Marijuana definitely serves as a quantum shifter of your usual mind-set, taking you beyond the grip of restrictive one-liner beliefs and ingrained assumptions. As we’ll see in more depth later, psychologically, cannabis helps you shift your trust beyond

ingrained religious concepts and tight ego control. It encourages you to look directly inward and explore realms of deep spiritual realization beyond the confines of a particular theology.

When high, you choose to listen to your own inner voice of wisdom and truth and to trust in your natural ability to open directly to and embrace the universal human virtues of compassion, honesty, trust, faith, joy, and service.” (Cannabis for Couples, 18).

The previous excerpt shows how cannabis – “as a quantum shifter of your usual mind-set” – is located as the source that gives shape to categories of “universal truths” and “societal dogma.” Moreover, these changes are characteristically undeniably powerful (i.e. “quantum shifter,” “deep spiritual realization”), and beyond rational inquiry (i.e. “inner voice of wisdom,” “the universal human virtues of compassion, honesty, trust, faith, joy”). As mentioned earlier, the users in Sandberg’s (2012, 74) research often stated that cannabis gave them insights “they would not otherwise get,” they had “more insight than most other people” and that they “understood things that others did not.” In Sandberg’s (2011) research, one user attributed his ideological transformation partially to cannabis, a transformation which he considered both positive and permanent.

The narratives about profound shifts in ordinary thought are also associated with cannabis’ function as an “exit drug,” in this case in a more spiritual manner than for the Progressive. An author in *Cannabis and Spirituality* (208) recalls how the experience of getting high for the first time was “deeply healing” and helped him recover from his inherited “family disease and curse” of alcoholism. In his words: “A few puffs on a joint...helped me to be baptized in a whole new way into my spiritual self, a consciousness-raising experience of great and long lasting [sic] personal value” (ibid.).

However, one is faced with the challenge of describing these revelatory experiences in ordinary language, since assertions of “reality” tend to refer to transcendent properties which are indeed “ultimately incomprehensible” (Graeber 2013, 232-3).

Given that the wise sometimes tell us that that which can be named is not the ultimate truth, I use the word spiritual as a convenient catchall for discussions associated with

that journey toward ultimate truth, enlightenment, awakened heart, God realization, or whatever other language we can use to attempt to describe the indescribable, or as Alan Watts put it, to ‘eff the ineffable and unscrew the inscrutable.’” (Cannabis and Spirituality, 14, emphasis in original).

Nature and Primitive Culture in Cannabis Narratives

This section extends Sandberg’s (2012, 74) note about how the boundary between natural and chemical corresponds to cannabis culture’s “moral and cultural opposition” towards modernity. In the following narratives, the “naturalness” of cannabis goes hand in hand with cannabis ability to dissolve dogma and call things back to nature. Cannabis is called “information from nature” (following excerpt) and a “plant teacher” (Cannabis and Spirituality, 21). And since cannabis is from nature and of nature, it would be ludicrous to think that cannabis would exert “plant dogma” or anything alike. A culture that rejects “nature” is thus suspect, as the following excerpt argues:

“Pot is basic information from nature, like following the seasons and learning the solstices. Any religion that doesn’t recognize the sun, moon and Earth is suspect. Culture that denies natural facts of spheres and cycles as embodied in the feminine is not worthy of the name.” (Cannabis and Spirituality, 194).

“These are great teachers, embodied as plants, here to show us something, and some are here to help take care of us.” (Cannabis and Spirituality, 21).

The long history between humans and cannabis is recited continuously and can be counted as further support for the “naturalness” and authenticity of cannabis use among humans. The demonization of cannabis during the past century is considered an utter “absurdity:”

“Eight thousand years ago, cannabis seeds were used as food in China. Six thousand years ago, the Chinese were cultivating an ancestor of Cannabis sativa for its stem fibers, as hemp for making cordage and weaving into textiles...From 1500’s up until a mere eighty years ago, cannabis was much appreciated here in North America as an exceptional herbal medicine and totally useful fiber source. Then the tables were

turned. The government's medical and legal establishment officially demonized the plant, and we are only now emerging from this absurd century of prohibition of the gifts of nature" (Cannabis and Spirituality, 23).

In consumer research, Thompson (2004) sees that the marketplace mythologies in the natural health market are linked to comparable alternative historical narratives or "countermemories" (Lipsitz 1990) which have been pushed to cultural margins by the dominant modern culture and Western medical science. The function of these types of narratives is to "express challenges to dominant cultural norms, values, and ideals and socioeconomic hierarchies," which in the natural health marketplace are directed towards "the dominant narratives of high modernism" (Thompson 2004, 171-2). Similar critique is palatable in the above excerpt which condemns the absurdity of past century's "prohibition of the gifts of nature."

Modern society's absurd prohibition is contrasted with countermemories about nomadic, archaic, and primitive cultures' cannabis use. These marginalized, romanticized historical narratives are linked to cannabis' capacity to subvert established ways of thinking:

"Nomadic cultures revered pot as a tool for change – an un-settler. Its revelation of the habitual and cultural can alter self-perception and social identity, making it inherently subversive to established ways of thought and government" (Cannabis and Spirituality, 194).

In Sandberg's (2011, 377) research, the cannabis users' pursuit to "find themselves" with the help of cannabis' "mildly spiritual" yet "natural" properties can be suggested to be categorized as Purist narratives. Thompson (2004) has recognized similar elements in the natural health market where the spiritual/physical rebirth permitted by the mystical and organic forces of nature are fervently sought after by consumers. Romantic constructions of nature essentially render natural forces as the reversal of modern culture's rationalistic and alienating tendencies (Thompson 2004; Canniford & Shankar 2013). Ernest Becker (1973, 32) has alluded to this tendency by saying that "when men really want to protest against artificialities, when they rebel against the symbolisms of culture, they fall back on the physical. They call thoughts down to earth, mannerisms back to basic chemistry."

The Hedonist

“In all honesty, most people tend to use marijuana because it makes them feel good”
(Cannabis for Couples, 30).

The Hedonist position is perhaps the most straightforward of the positions. Throughout the past century cannabis has had a stable meaning as a recreational drug (e.g. Booth 2003). The Hedonist celebrates cannabis’ ability to immerse the user into recreational activities and enhance pleasure. The fact that cannabis has the capacity to overwhelm the user and create changes in her subjectivity in a way that her actions seem to befall “beyond the control of the everyday self” (Strömberg 2008, 436) is celebrated by the Hedonist. The Hedonist uses cannabis to mark a departure from productive, mundane activities into recreational ones. Previously, Strömberg (2008) has proposed that the consumption of legal drugs (alcohol and cigarettes in his case) may sometimes meet the criteria of being categorized as play, that is, “a free activity standing quite consciously outside ‘ordinary’ life... absorbing the player intensely and utterly...with no material interest... within its own proper boundaries of time and space according to fixed rules and in an orderly manner” (Huizinga 1950, 13). Similar to the Purist, the Hedonist also uses cannabis to break away from the ordinary. However, whereas the Purist pursues permanent transformation through spiritual experience, the Hedonist uses cannabis to immerse herself into the inherent pleasures of play where subjectivity is transformed only temporarily.

Cannabis Use as a Marker of Leisure

Cannabis is argued to fit largely any recreational activity, as the author of *Weed Mom* (246, emphasis in original) exclaims: “Essentially, if you can do *whatever you already love* safely while incorporating cannabis, give it a whirl.” Examples include yoga, meditation, creative work, hiking, brunch, socializing, Netflix, massage, bubble bath etc. (e.g. *Women’s Guide for Cannabis*, 37). The advocated activities are characteristically non-competitive, since for the Hedonist, enhancing performance is only secondary. The purpose of associating cannabis use with recreational activities relates to the pursuit of flow, immersion, euphoria, and enjoyment:

“I’ve heard it spoken like this – that cannabis floods the time part of your brain, and you get this deep feeling of being in the now. It really does that for you. It slaps you right into the now. You have no interest in the past, no interest in the future. You’re just kind of here. It allows you to focus. So it’s really great for journaling, or drawing, or listening to music. It allows you to absorb yourself into what you’re doing.” – Shannon Chiarenza, the “Weed Mama” (Weed Mom, 262).

“Since becoming a mother, my ALL-time favorite leisure and “me” activity is sitting on my balcony alone and enjoying a joint. Then I draw a super-hot bath and choose an essential oil to add. I light a few candles and submerge myself totally under water, with only my nose out.” – Stephany, mom of 1, Florida (Weed Mom, 262).”

Shannon states that cannabis allows the person to “absorb” herself into whatever activity one wants to be engaged with. Past and future are temporarily demoted to secondary statuses; the user’s attention is brought intensely to the present moment where the individual is free to explore recreational activities. Stephany’s quote exemplifies how cannabis use marks a departure from the responsibilities of everyday life into the realm of leisure. By ritualistically submerging herself fully into a hot bath, she further accentuates her separation from the responsibilities of the outside world.

Cannabis as “Feminine”

Cannabis is sometimes referred to with the pronouns “she/her” (e.g. Cannabis and Spirituality, 18-37). This may be linked to cannabis’ association with the maternal, rejuvenating, and purifying forces of nature (see also Thompson 2004) as stated in *Cannabis and Spirituality*:

“Cannabis also brings very much the feminine presence... Cannabis brings comfort, tenderness, delicacy – it’s subtle, ethereal. It’s what comes after purification. For us cannabis is about the Divine Feminine.” (Cannabis and Spirituality, 169).

Both the Purist and the Hedonist conceive of cannabis as a source of overwhelming power that has the capacity to transform ordinary subjectivity (see also Strömberg 2008) and in this

sense absorb the user into awe-inspiring and blissful experiences which are identified with the maternal powers of nature (see also Thompson 2004). In contrast to the Purist's spiritual pursuits, however, the Hedonist celebrates cannabis' feminine qualities for their ability to absorb the individual into pleasurable activities.

The feminine cannabis is qualitatively differentiated from "masculine" substances. In *Cannabis and Spirituality* (e.g. 192-206) cannabis is identified with the feminine yin, whereas alcohol (also painkillers, cigarettes and speed) is identified with the masculine yang (i.e. "yang drug"). Cannabis is said to "open up" a person to experience reality more "directly" (*Cannabis and Spirituality*, 67, 4, 247), making people more sensitive, both physically and mentally. On the other hand, alcohol and other "yang drugs" promote survival mechanisms of "fight, flight, shock, [and] numbing" (*Cannabis and Spirituality*, 199). The following excerpt criticizes contemporary culture for its rejection of "feminine" qualities and for its predisposition towards masculine pursuits. While doing so, the excerpt sheds light on the properties of the suppressed "feminine" which cannabis use is argued to reinvigorate (also e.g. *Cannabis and Spirituality*; *Cannabis for Couples*; *Weed Mom*). Here, the feminine cannabis is associated with the inherent pleasures of art, beauty and joy:

"What do we lose, what do men lose when we deny the feminine, the yin, inside and out? We lose joy, the felt experience of beauty... We are afraid of joy – even more than pain. Stress, we're good with that – but entering joy puts us at risk of being grabbed and accused. It is somehow effeminate. But is it girlish to sit, to observe, to "take things in?" That is yin mind... Learning to live without beauty, men lose their roles as protectors and companions of beauty. Lost in yang battles, we work for nothing but money and other forms of power over the powerless. This is the loss of ethics in the loss of aesthetics" (*Cannabis and Spirituality*, 204-5, emphasis in original).

The feminine, pleasurable qualities are also highly celebrated in the context of sex. Cannabis is said to allow users, particularly women, to "switch over" to "the feminine side of us that's softer, more process-oriented, and open to possibilities" (*Weed Mom*, 196). The "switch" into the feminine side is registered as a heightened sensitivity for sexual pleasure:

Inhaling the fragrant smoke, my endocannabinoid receptors were massaged and my sense of touch ignited. And the serum's effects were like a sprinkling of fairy dust on my most sensitive parts. You know the medieval paintings of the saints, or the Virgin Mary, with those glowing, golden orbs encircling cherubic heads upturned in prayer? That was me – only the glowy orb emanated from deep in my center and pulsed itself in unrelenting waves of hell yeahs through my entire body” (Weed Mom, 191, emphasis in original).

In conclusion, the “feminine” qualities of cannabis can be interpreted to promote properties of play, namely, the loss of material pursuits, the freedom to explore, and to be in the “now,” that is within a spatio-temporal realm of play (e.g. Huizinga 1950, 13). The Hedonist celebrates cannabis’ capacity to allow the user to break from the “masculine” culture predisposed on productivity, materiality and power into the realm of emotive, “feminine” play that is inherently pleasurable and meant to be absorbed in full.

The Optimizer

The Optimizer celebrates cannabis use as a means for improved performance. The Optimizer does not primarily pursue a *romantic* contact with the “natural” cannabis to break away from the rationalistic logic of modernity like the Purist (see also Tumbat & Belk 2010), nor does she primarily care about the pleasurable or medicinal qualities of cannabis like the Hedonist or the Progressive, respectively. For the Optimizer, these qualities are only secondary. The Optimizer finds cannabis to be a versatile *tool* for enhancing creativity, improving sexual performance, loosening up the body, and more generally, for transcending one’s immediate bodily limitations. The Optimizer tames the wild cannabis into an instrument and employs its “natural” forces to elevate her performance beyond their natural limits. While this might amount to sacrilege for an unyielding Purist, for the Optimizer cannabis is technology.

The Optimizer position is anything but an explicit position in the cannabis cultural discourse, particularly because of its entanglement with medical discourse. For example, there is a fine line between treating stress, which might amount to a legitimate reason for self-medication, and “boosting mood,” which rather transforms cannabis into a type of cognitive-enhancer. The individual’s right to medicate is also an arena of ongoing social justice struggle, making

the concept of “legitimate illness” more ambiguous (e.g. Hathaway & Rossiter 2007; Hazekamp & Pappas 2019; Thompson 2003; Thompson & Troester 2002). The cannabis self-help authors’ roles as cultural intermediaries is also to legitimize their domain of expertise (e.g. Cronin 2004) which may incline them to seek alignments with medical discourses as a strategy for attaining legitimacy (Huff et al. 2021).

Another issue is that the celebratory narratives only occasionally emphasize purely the performance-enhancing qualities of cannabis; celebration is often coupled with an emphasis that getting high “feels amazing” (A Woman’s Guide to Cannabis, 8):

I use cannabis for better health and because it produces a mellow euphoria and sustained focus that I enjoy. Touting cannabis only for “wellness” downplays the fun and pleasure of it – as if pure enjoyment were a mark of degeneracy. It isn’t. I claim all the things: healing, self-care, pleasure, and transcendence – and so can you” (Weed Mom, 32, emphasis in original).

This excerpt shows celebration of cannabis’ capacity to improve health, enhance pleasure but also to “sustain focus.” These can be categorized as celebration of medicinal use, recreational use, and performance-enhancement, respectively. Although the consumption goal of enhanced performance is more difficult to delineate than the others, it nevertheless can be distinguished from the other three prevalent consumption goals identified with each position, namely health (the Progressive), spirituality (the Purist) and recreation (the Hedonist), all of which have more settled and explicit meanings in the cannabis cultural discourse.

Enhancement

The performance-enhancing effects attributed to cannabis often refer to its relaxing properties. Previously, Lorente et al. (2005) have found that athletes taking part in a variety of “sliding sports” (i.e. surfing, snowboarding, skateboarding) sometimes use cannabis with the purpose of relaxation to enhance their sporting performance, although recreational use is also common in these activities. The empirical materials fervently emphasize the suitability

of cannabis' relaxing properties for yoga. The body is reported to simply move better when high:

“The biggest benefit to combining yoga and cannabis, says Dussault, is that it helps people relax both mind and body. Mental benefits, she tells me, include decreasing anxiety and growing one’s awareness of the moment, aka mindfulness or presence. And because it helps soothe tension while easing pain and inflammation, cannabis makes it possible for people to practice yoga when they might otherwise just skip it. “If you’re tight, if you’re in pain – it’s hard to even think about getting down on the floor,” says Dussault. But with a little bit of cannabis, the body can feel looser and more amenable to stretch, movement, and mindful breathing. Indeed, says Dussault, who’s taught Ganja Yoga since 2009 and trained hundreds of other yoga teachers in the style, “cannabis can make people want to do yoga.”” (Weed Mom, 248).

Cannabis is considered an “aid to yoga” (Weed Mom, 32). However, note in the above excerpt how cannabis’ “aid” comprises not only its relaxing effects for the body but also “mental benefits” which, in a magical manner, also allow the individual to align her mind accordingly for the practice. The “mental benefits” are not celebrated as performance-enhancing per se; rather they are celebrated in the manner of the Hedonist, that is, to allow heightened immersion into the activity. In this sense, the above excerpt does not exemplify a “pure” Optimizer, but rather a balanced combination with the Hedonist. Interestingly, not a single excerpt regarding yoga could be found where performance-enhancement is celebrated exclusively; enhanced performance *and* heightened immersion and pleasure both seem to be salient points of celebration regarding cannabis use in yoga. Nevertheless, the performance-enhancing effects of cannabis can be clearly delineated in the above excerpt. However, the simultaneous celebration of performance-enhancement *and* heightened immersion and pleasure would suggest that this narrative as a whole is more aptly characterized as a magical consumption narrative (e.g. Arnould et al. 1999). Magical consumption with cannabis will be inspected thoroughly in the section Contrariety of Allurement: Cannabis Magic.

Another widely celebrated quality of cannabis is its ability to augment creativity (see also Sandberg 2011; 2012). In the following excerpt, cannabis is considered a “creativity boost” and a focus enhancer:

“Artists have been getting high to produce beautiful music, art, and books since the dawn of time. Cannabis is a creativity boost and increases focus while it reduces depression and anxiety – the perfect cocktail for productive, creative work” (A Woman’s Guide to Cannabis, 67).

The celebration of heightened creativity and focus for the purpose of doing “productive, creative work” can be delineated as a type of performance-enhancement corresponding to the Optimizer. Celebration of heightened focus is particularly interesting considering how opposite it is to the spiritual and borderline schizophrenic effects that were reported in the Purist section. Here, however, cannabis is found to enhance the individual’s capacity for creative work. Yet, again, the ability to “focus” on “producing beautiful music” can be also interpreted as a heightened ability to immerse oneself into a recreational activity rather than as an improvement to produce actual work. Note also the simultaneous celebration of cannabis’ ability to treat illnesses which may inhibit the ability to do creative work.

In the following excerpt, cannabis is suggested as creativity boost in the workplace. Notably, the following excerpt is the only direct suggestion in the empirical materials for cannabis use in the context of a modern working environment. Choosing the correct dose and strain is important for attaining optimal performance, but also because of the threat of “overdoing” it. Luckily for the Optimizer, the legalized recreational cannabis markets provide capabilities to optimize cannabis use with its offering of standardized, quality controlled, and mechanically precise products which are here also celebrated for their discreetness (see Huff et al. 2021):

“Q: I work at a creative job and would like to use cannabis to enhance my performance.

A: Sometimes taking the edge off at work will not only allow you to make it through the day, but it just may give you new ideas and a fresh perspective. Obviously, you should not smoke in the office – don’t overdo it, smell like weed, or be careless. Bring a vape pen to discreetly medicate during the day. Sativa is the route to go at work, as it keeps you sharp. Choose a 1:1 THC/CBD strain to reduce stress and boost creativity, or choose a CBD-only strain to stay clear-headed and focused...” (A Woman’s Guide to Cannabis, 102).

Note how the author recognizes the transgressive nature of cannabis use in the workplace, and thus suggests towards a degree of discretion. Also, note the use of the term “medicate” in the context of boosting creativity at work with cannabis. It is possible that the term is used with a hint of irony. However, it may also refer to the passing mention that cannabis reduces stress which may be counted as an illness or as a cause for one. The performance-enhancing use of cannabis is this way aligned with medical discourse, which might justify the use of the term “medicate” without irony. Alignments with medical discourses could be also interpreted as efforts to renegotiate stigmatic associations (i.e. “don’t overdo it, smell like weed, or be careless”) (e.g. Pedersen & Sandberg 2012; also Thompson 2003; Thompson & Troester 2002). Alternatively, such alignments can be interpreted as strategies to legitimize and “intellectualize” a domain of expertise (Cronin 2004, 350-1; Huff et al. 2021). Nevertheless, despite the concomitance of medical meanings, cannabis is said to “take the edge off,” “allow [one] to make it through the day,” “keep you sharp,” and “boost creativity,” all of which can be delineated as celebratory assertions about enhanced performance.

Cannabis is also attributed aphrodisiac qualities. Yet again, it is open to interpretation whether these qualities refer purely to the augmentation of pleasure or also to the enhancement of libido and the ability to perform. Safe to say, both tend to be evoked and welcomed simultaneously by users in a magical manner (more on this in *Contrary of Allurement: Cannabis Magic*). In this excerpt, cannabis is suggested as a sexual aid. Particularly, the desired property of “relaxation” can be most readily interpreted as a type of performance-enhancement:

“Q: I’ve heard cannabis can be a sexual aid, too. Is that true?”

A: Cannabis is thought to be an aphrodisiac, and we can use it in a few different ways to live our best sex life. Use a vape pen for an inhalation or two of an indica, body-high blend of 10-milligram-THC/10-milligram-CBD strain for relaxation and a good mood, or plan ahead and share an edible for dessert, so the effects are felt by the time you get to the bedroom. When you get there, use some cannabis-infused massage oil and lubricant for extra tingle” (A Woman’s Guide to Cannabis, 104).

In conclusion, the Optimizer uses cannabis as a performance-enhancing drug. However, as the above narratives show, celebration of the performance-enhancing effects is often blurred

with other celebratory meanings. This could mean that cannabis is rarely used purely for the sake of performance-enhancement. Optimizer narratives are also arguably less legitimate than Progressive narratives which lean heavily on the legitimacy of medical science, from which the Optimizer diverts, aside from borrowing some of its vocabulary. Within the framework of modern medical/medicinal use of cannabis (e.g. Hazekamp & Pappas 2019), “medicating” to enhance creativity at a job would be considered expressive of potential substance abuse, despite the user’s experience of improvement for wellbeing and/or performance. It is also possible that some Optimizer narratives refer to a pattern of drug use where the person “initially use[s] cannabis recreationally but then discover[s], consciously or subconsciously, an improvement of psychiatric symptoms of a diagnosed or undiagnosed condition” (Hazekamp & Pappas 2019, 322). In this sense, the Optimizer is more of a risk taker since she reaches beyond the limits of the body as defined by medical science in pursuit for improved performance. Since the Optimizer is not protected by the legitimacy of medical research, the threat of developing substance abuse problems – or the threat of being labelled as a substance abuser – may incline users to abstain.

Relations between Celebratory Positions

The second section of the Findings inspects the relations between the four distinct celebratory positions. The semiotic square (Figure 1) illustrates the relations between the positions. It also functions as a map for the following section. The first two chapters inspect the two contradictory relations named *contradiction of individualism* and *contradiction of standards*. The second two chapters inspect the two contrary relations named *contrariety of allurement* and *contrariety of morality*. The terms “Cannabis Magic” and “Religious Devotion” denote the various possible combinations, in other words, syntheses, between the contrary positions, respectively. The relations will be inspected in the order shown.

Contradiction of Individualism: Cannabis as Progress/Play

The contradiction of individualism between the Hedonist and the Progressive is straightforward. The responsibilities of everyday life threaten the Hedonist’s ability to

immerse herself into the inherent pleasures of play. At the same time, getting “caught up” in play (Strömberg 2008) threatens the Progressive’s role as a healthy, productive and responsible member of society. Although their consumption goals are contradictory, both see a solution in cannabis use. The empirical materials portray *cannabis self-care* as a way to manage this contradiction as it achieves both pleasure and the production of a healthy, responsible individual.

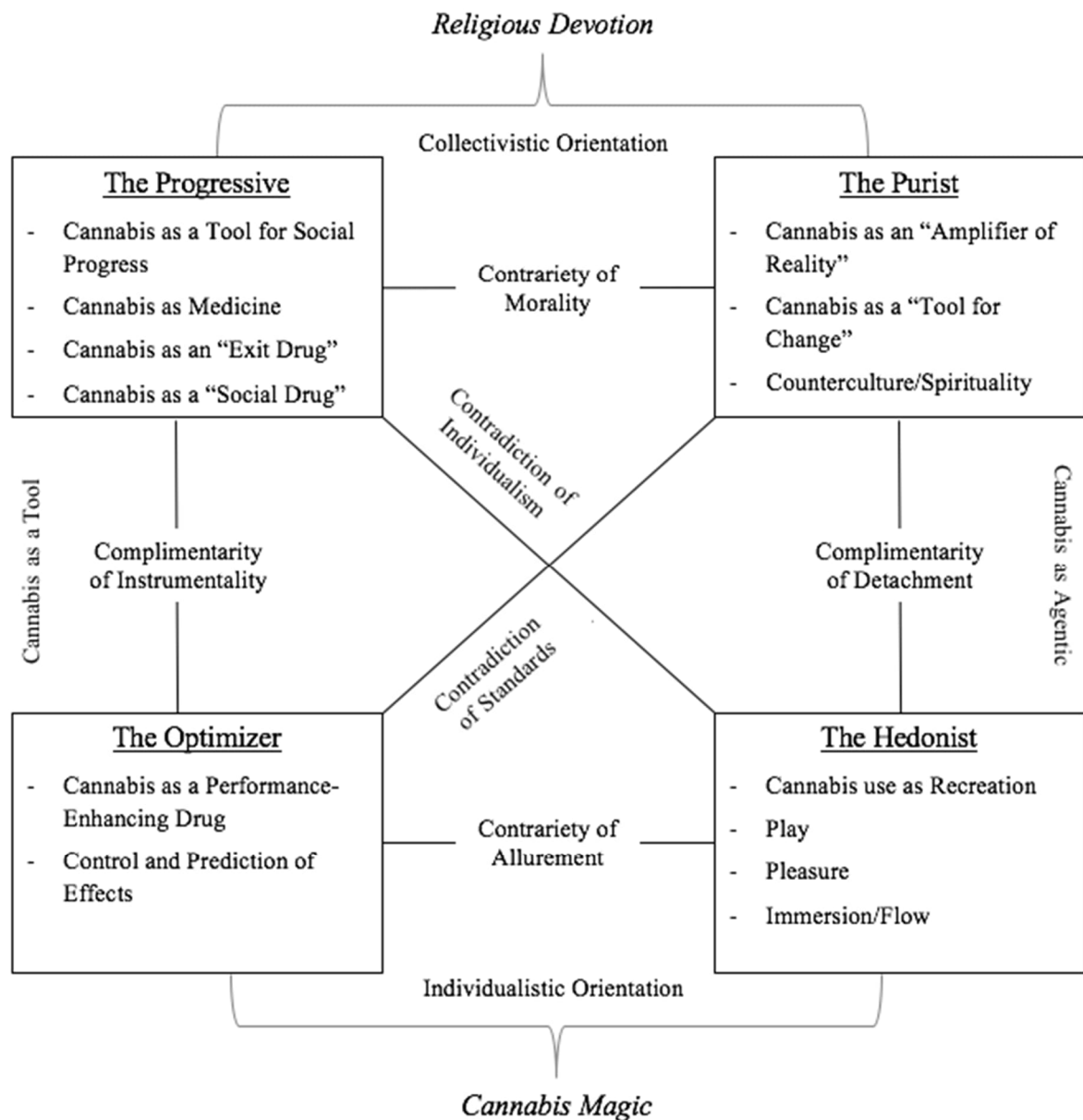


Figure 1: Celebratory Positions: A Semiotic Square

Cannabis Self-Care

More often than not, the empirical materials portray forms of cannabis use which divert from the recommendations of medical professionals (e.g. Hazekamp & Pappas 2019) – a point which the authors do not forget to emphasize. Instead, cannabis use is suggested to be incorporated into healthy activities such as yoga, meditation, hiking or jogging which are in their essence themselves undeniably beneficial for the individual’s wellbeing. Yet, the descriptions of these self-care activities highlight their inherent pleasures, immersion, free exploration, and separation from ordinary life – all of which can be associated with play (e.g. Huizinga 1950, 13). This “twist” allows the attribution of health benefits to cannabis consumption although they diverge from legitimate medical cannabis treatments. In this sense, *cannabis self-care* diverges from Huizinga’s (1950, 13) definition of play (see section on the Hedonist) in that it has a *material end* of improved wellness. Furthermore, cannabis self-care diverges from legitimate self-medication in that it does not refer to treating a diagnosed illness, but rather to improving and restoring wellbeing. In the following, I show that cannabis self-care can be interpreted as a way to manage indulgent cannabis use without intervening with the user’s role as a healthy, productive individual and as a responsible member of society.

In the following excerpts, note how pleasure is considered a critical part of a self-care activity, in this case physical exercise. Cannabis is suggested as a “helping hand,” specifically to make self-care more enjoyable:

“Sophie Saint-Thomas emphasizes that self-care is something you do for yourself alone. “If you’re working out,” she says, “it’s not because you’re trying to look hot for someone else – you’re doing it because it feels good.”

Approaching fitness from that perspective, I believe that conscientious, low-dose cannabis use can lend a helping hand...Anandamide circulates in the body with exercise, and THC adds more feel-good chemicals to the mix; quite simply, it feels great to elevate a bit and move your body.” (Weed Mom 259-260, emphasis in original).

The next excerpt illustrates the emphasis put on constructing a realm that is separate from everyday life. The individual ought to be free to “explore self-care,” a notion which evokes associations with play (e.g. Huizinga 1950, 13; Strömberg 2008) as inspected in the section on the Hedonist:

“Before we get down to details, a quick note about setting and circumstance: I strongly recommend setting aside solo, phone-free time to explore self-care with cannabis... Do yourself a gigantic favor and choose a moment for bringing self-care and cannabis together when you can truly and safely be alone sans the kids and devices hell-bent on pinging you out of you-time... Carving out the space and time for your well-being is part of the practice” (Weed Mom, 246, emphasis in original).

The benefits of cannabis self-care are reported to “carryover” from the separate self-care context into everyday life. The emphasis in this excerpt, however, is on mental health and/or spirit rather than the body, which further highlights the role and importance of pleasure and leisure in the reasoning for engaging with cannabis self-care:

“...cannabis is a natural fit for Jenn’s self-care: ‘It lends itself so naturally to those rituals that are just about slowing down,’ she says... And since Jenn’s been a longtime conscious user, she’s learned that cannabis works a bit like meditation in that ‘it’s not just benefiting you in the time that you’re doing it.’ Instead, she finds there’s a carryover that she’s bringing into other parts of life, a “touchstone for the hard moments.” (Weed Mom, 244).

Goulding et al. (2009) have shown how the consumption of drugs in a night club “contains” drug use and renders it into a form of “restorative leisure” that reaffirms the order of the mundane rather than disrupts it. Cannabis self-care narratives bring forth the idea of “contained self-indulgence:” cannabis use is not purely recreational, “ecstasy for the sake of ecstasy,” but a self-care activity with tangible benefits for the individual’s wellbeing that supports her during the “hard moments” of ordinary life. Moreover, Goulding et al. (2009, 768) show that the night club “does not eliminate illegality; rather, its effects are limited and its politics renegotiated” in a way that they do not intervene with the clubbers’ ordinary lives as economically productive people. Although cannabis use is legal in this context, in a similar tone, cannabis self-care can be interpreted to re-negotiate “the politics of indulgence”

in a way that can be sustainably incorporated into the cycle of everyday life. As the last excerpt shows, cannabis self-care is actually found to support the order of the mundane.

Contradiction of Standards: Cannabis as a Sacrament/Technology

There is a peculiar paradox in this discourse: it is reported that cannabis aids people in getting rid of unhealthy behavioral and thought patterns while it is simultaneously recognized that cannabis use may *itself* take the form of an unhealthy dependence. In other words, cannabis is, paradoxically, considered both liberating and enslaving (e.g. Mick & Fournier 1998). In the following, I investigate how the Purist and the Optimizer seek liberation but in mutually opposing ways. Another term is transcendence. The Purist surrenders to the overwhelming power of cannabis to gain spiritual insights and to resist enslavement to structures of domination. On the other hand, it is exactly the overwhelming power of cannabis which threatens to enslave the Optimizer who aims to control and predict the effects of cannabis and bend them for her own ends. The Purist and the Optimizer seek liberation and/or transcendence but in contradictory ways, hence the contradiction of standards in the semiotic square.

Maintaining Sacrality

The Purist finds that the overwhelming, yet beneficial effects of cannabis can liberate her from unhealthy dependencies. The following shows how the Purist seeks to preserve the potency of these overwhelming, “sacramental” effects of cannabis. The following section shows how the Optimizer’s consumption practices, on the other hand, aim to evade the threat of overwhelming effects, thus revealing contradictory consumption purposes in relation to the Purist.

The following excerpts are from a Brazilian shaman Mariano in *Cannabis and Spirituality* who religiously seeks divine inspiration with sacramental cannabis use. He strongly represents the Purist position. Mariano elaborates that this type of “sacred use” goes beyond recreation, for it allows one to “investigate some serious things, or to do something that [one needs] inspiration for” in a way that is “not exactly recreational use” (Cannabis and

Spirituality, 164). Mariano recognizes that the desired sacramental effects of cannabis are threatened by a lack of “discipline,” which he relates to the frequent association of cannabis use with everyday life activities:

“But people are using a lot of marijuana in a kind of excessive way. They use it every day. They use it in the morning, they use it to sleep, they use it to wake up, they use it before eating, they use it after eating. They use it because they are happy, they use it because they are sad, they use it before sex, they use it after sex. That way they can become dependent. The recreational use allows addiction... So the religious use, or the inspirational use let’s say, doesn’t allow addiction because with addiction you don’t have the special effects of the herb. It starts to be common, almost normal. It loses quality... (Cannabis and Spirituality, 164).

“This kind of sacred use needs discipline... It’s a kind of anti-addiction discipline. For example, if you use it every night, then you don’t use it, it’s going to be hard for you to sleep. Then you need to get used to sleeping with no cannabis. That’s addiction.” (Cannabis and Spirituality, 165).

Here, “recreational use” draw its from its opposition to “sacramental use.” Recreational use lacks “special effects.” Although referred to as recreational use, this description does not refer to the Hedonist since she also pursues contact with extraordinary flows. What Mariano is describing as “recreational use” would according to this thesis adhere to a type of “performance-enhancement use” characteristic of the Optimizer, where cannabis is rather used to “boost” various things, such as eating, waking up, sleeping etc. Mariano emphasizes that the sacramental effects of cannabis are diminished by the habitual and rationalistic use of cannabis where cannabis is essentially transformed into an instrument and used to enhance everyday life activities. Cannabis use becoming “common, almost normal” threatens the Purist’s pursuit of extraordinary experiences.

Belk et al. (1989) suggest four means of perpetuating sacredness, two of which accord with the means proposed to preserve the sacramental powers of cannabis in the empirical materials. These means are (1) the separation of the sacred from the profane and (2) sustaining rituals to prevent rationalization and habituation. The first one, the separation of the sacred from the profane, essentially relates to the establishment of proper boundaries

between the indescribable yet undeniably powerful sacred and the rational, ordinary categories of everyday life, that is, the profane (e.g. Belk et al. 1989; Anttonen 1996; Douglas 1999/1975). Mariano sees that the association of cannabis use with the profane everyday life threatens the potency of cannabis' transformative, sacramental effects. To protect these powers, Mariano adheres to what he calls "discipline" or "anti-addiction discipline" which is related to abstaining from cannabis use in the everyday life. Since indiscernible boundaries between the ordinary times and the extraordinary times leave only the ordinary in place (Belk et al. 1989), to preserve cannabis' extraordinary effects, the Purist attributes cannabis the status of the sacred which sets it apart from the ordinary systems of classifications and the profane everyday life.

The second means to perpetuate sacredness, the sustenance of rituals to prevent rationalization and habituation (Belk et al. 1989), relates particularly to the emic term "respect," which refers to preparing for cannabis use and adherence to proper ritual behavior:

Respect and discipline are two key terms to keep in mind. Respect refers to the context in which one uses Santa Maria, and discipline refers more to the frequency of use. (Cannabis and Spirituality, 184, emphasis in original).

"Respect" may be understood as readiness and proper preparation for encountering powerful natural forces (see also Arnould & Price 1993; Arnould et al. 1999). Lack of "respect," that is, using cannabis in an inappropriate context without proper preparation, may subject the user to negative experiences such as feelings of paranoia, anxiety and fear (e.g. Cannabis and Spirituality 246-8), colloquially referred to as "bad trips." Another emic term that emphasizes the importance of preparation and the ritual context is "the set and setting" (see the Purist section). If proper "discipline" is maintained and the ambivalent, kratophanous powers of cannabis are this way preserved, "respect" establishes a proper behavioral-context of drug use (Vuchinich 2002, 99) which functions to inhibit evil powers and to maintain beneficial ones (see Belk et al. 1989).

The threat of rationalization and habituation is evident in Mariano's narrative, where using cannabis "to sleep," "to eat," "to wake up" etc. is understood to strip cannabis of its "special effects." Rationalization strips the sacred of its "essential mystery" and divine power (Belk et al. 1989, 27), transforming it into something familiar. Ritual works to maintain the

separation of the sacred from the profane and to symbolically transform objects into sacred consumption objects (Belk et al. 1989).

In conclusion, the Purist sets cannabis use apart from everyday life by formulating protective rules that set the “sacred” cannabis into an appropriate ritual context that preserves cannabis’ beneficial sacramental effects. Importantly, these rules also protect everyday life activities from contamination (see Belk et al. 1989). Mariano, for example, can be interpreted to protect his abilities to sleep, eat, and be productive by adhering to these protective rules. The rules protect him from enslavement (dependence) to cannabis, but they also protect cannabis’ potency as a sacrament.

Guaranteeing Performance

What is fervently sought after by the Purist threatens the Optimizer, namely, the mysterious and overwhelming effects of cannabis that cannot be predicted, controlled, and thus incorporated into daily life for guaranteed improved performance. The Optimizer manages overwhelming power by formulating the “optimal” consumption code that fits her unique daily life.

Two basic strategies are identified which the Optimizer uses to comprise a consumption code that guarantees performance-enhancing effects and conversely evades the threat of overwhelming influences. These strategies are identical to two coping strategies in Mick and Fournier’s (1998) research which they name “mastering” and “distancing,” that is, learning the effects of the consumption object and finding appropriate consumption contexts, respectively. Mick and Fournier (1998) propose that technology consumers resort to both coping strategies in encounters with the freedom/enslavement paradox (see Mick & Fournier 1998).

The Optimizer evades the threat of overwhelming effects through “mastery” of the drug (see Mick and Fournier 1998). Mastery is necessary for the optimal execution of daily activities, but also for the evasion threats that are associated with overwhelming cannabis intoxication. The author of *Weed Mom* maintains that it is necessary to adhere to certain rules about when and how it is appropriate to use cannabis as a parent. Since it is understood that there is

indeed sub-optimal use of cannabis (i.e. recreational use, “irresponsible” use) which threatens parenting capacities, finding the “optimal” consumption code is absolutely vital. When done right, however, the author maintains that cannabis use actually makes her a better parent. She calls this optimal code of cannabis consumption “responsible use:”

“By now, you’ve surely gathered that the most important piece of using cannabis as a mom is doing so responsibly – in a way that enriches your ability to live life well and care for yourself and your family. That means finding your minimum effective dose for relief or mood enhancement, and knowing when, where, and how frequently using cannabis will support your physical and mental well-being” (Weed Mom, 245, emphasis in original).

The key to “responsible use” is finding one’s “minimum effective dose” which allows one to live life ideally and responsibly. This type of use is also sometimes referred to as microdosing and moderate dosing (Weed Mom, 89-90). Peculiarly, the effects of this type of use may be largely undetectable even for the user herself (e.g. Weed Mom, 245). Furthermore, “responsible use” does not necessarily refer to a prescription by a medical professional. Rather, people are advised to make their own judgements about what type of cannabis use is beneficial and “responsible” enough to be incorporated into their day-to-day lives (Weed Mom, 89-90). The following is a fragment from a list of rules for developing an optimal – and “responsible” – cannabis consumption regime, particularly for “weed moms:”

- *Make sure you trust your source (i.e. shop at a legal dispensary or grow your own)*
- *Develop awareness of your own tolerance levels and consume within those limits*
- *Use the smallest amount to achieve your desired effects, aka your minimum effective dose*
- *Determine safe settings and situations, and use cannabis only in the appropriate places and times*
- *Avoid consuming when you are not healthy enough to do so (except, of course if you’re treating medically with cannabis under a health professional’s care)*
- *Avoid overusing cannabis, either in one session or over a period of time*
- *Don’t use cannabis to cope with your problems or escape emotionally*

(Weed Mom, 90).

The above fragment is a method for attaining mastery of cannabis. This allows the user to “command the product so totally as to mitigate the negative side [of the paradoxes]” (Mick & Fournier 1998, 138), that is, the overwhelming power of cannabis. Note how the last bullet point suggests that even the “beneficial” overwhelming forces of cannabis may pose issues for the Optimizer; cannabis is attributed the capacity to “do away” with the problems of everyday life, which is essentially what the Purist aims to do, although in a proper context. For the Optimizer, however, this overwhelming capacity poses threats of dependency and incompetence. The user may “escape” her problems to cannabis use and become enslaved by it; she effectively rejects her responsibilities. “Mastery” evades these threats (Mick & Fournier 1998).

Another issue is determining the situations in which cannabis use actually enhances performance. As the above list fragment suggests, one must “[d]etermine safe settings and situations, and use cannabis only in the appropriate places and times.” For example, cannabis use is generally considered unfitting for the modern working environment and for performing mechanical tasks:

“...in the same way that you wouldn’t probably drink a six pack and then do your taxes, you probably wouldn’t want to smoke a strong strain of grass and then attend a corporate strategy meeting – unless you know that you perform well at that level when you are high...” (Cannabis for Couples, 32).

However, “responsible cannabis use” where cannabis use is “mastered,” is suggested to be fitting for playing with children. Cannabis is felt to improve parenting, for its relaxing effects allow the parent to evoke a “more nurturing version” of herself:

“...When consuming responsibly, I’m not a different person or a chemically forged supermom. What I am is a less harried version of me. A more chill, more appreciative, and quite honestly, more nurturing version – like the me from a universe just one click away, a me who doesn’t stress nearly as much about things that don’t actually require stressing.

Now that version of me, I admit, doesn't mix with writing on deadline, or operating a motor vehicle, or doing anything that requires my sharpest intellect and hand-eye coordination – you get the picture. But it mixes incredibly well with building fairy houses, playing (but not winning) at board games, and running around the park with my kids and our dog. (Weed Mom, 116, emphasis in original).

Mick and Fournier (1998) note that “distancing” is a fundamental coping strategy for managing paradoxes in the context of technology consumption. Essentially, technology consumers manage paradoxes by formulating restrictive rules on when and how to use technology (Mick & Fournier 1998). Here, cannabis use is “controlled” by the formulation of protective rules which maintain a proper distance to inappropriate contexts that may be vulnerable to cannabis’ detaching influence.

Contrariety of Allurement: Cannabis Magic

Consumers find cannabis to have an undeniable agency and power of its own, yet they also continually play an active role in constructing their desires and creating their destinies (e.g. Belk et al. 2003; Epp & Price 2010). Transformative powers are harnessed but they are not seen to reside purely in the individual nor in cannabis, but their relationship (e.g. Borgerson 2005; Belk 1988; Fernandez & Lastovicka 2011). Previously, consumers have been shown to imbue consumption objects with special powers to attain empowerment, healing, grace, transformation etc. (Belk 1991; Fernandez & Lastovicka 2011; St. James et al. 2011; Arnould et al. 1999). Here, I show how consumers imbue cannabis with special powers and place it in ritual contexts to intentionally evoke hidden forces to solve complex problems in their lives (e.g. Arnould et al. 1999).

The consumption narratives inspected in the following involve elements which in previous research have been associated with magical consumption (e.g. Arnould et al. 1999). “Magic” is a general term, as Arnould et al. (1999, 38) state, but its main functions may be condensed into three elements: (1) “magic activates a link between people and natural forces” (2) magic “calls upon immanent powers to achieve certain ends,” (3) “magic always has both existential and social consequences, and is at once both instrumental and expressive.” The following section inspects cannabis consumption narratives in light of these elements.

The semiotic square shows that in *Cannabis Magic*, the Optimizer and the Hedonist meet in a balancing act. In this synthesis, the human agent pursues to instrumentalize cannabis for practical ends by aligning her mind and emotions accordingly to harness immanent powers. According to Arnould et al. (1999), in magical praxis, emotional and aesthetic motives are willingly mixed with practical motives. In the semiotic square, *Cannabis Magic* can be illustrated as a movement between the Hedonist's *emotional* and *aesthetic motives* and the Optimizer's *practical motives*.

Firstly, magic in its essence concerns the individual's willful and intentional pursuit to align her mind and emotions for contact with latent forces (Arnould, et al. 1999). According to Malinowski's (1948, 70) famous formulation: "[t]he function of magic is to ritualize man's optimism, to enhance his faith in the victory of hope over fear." In the following excerpt, cannabis is seen to ritualize the author's mind and emotions for weight loss. The role of magic in weight loss has also been a topic in previous consumer research (St. James et al. 2011). Since participation in a weight loss program is fraught with uncertainty and threats of anxiety and embarrassment, consumers have been shown to engage in magical thinking to turn ambiguity into a source of hope and to transform "impossibilities into possibilities" (St. James et al. 2011, 647). In the following excerpt, the author tells how during uncertain moments she can realign her mind and find emotional stability through cannabis use. On a further note, although the author notes that some cannabis strains have been found to have appetite-suppressing properties, the following excerpt highlights particularly cannabis's ability to enhance emotional stability and the attainment of willpower. The author imbues cannabis with powers which are not reduced to its appetite-suppressing properties as she states that she "can live with being hungry." Rather than suppressing appetite, she gains "willpower to resist food:"

"Without cannabis, I cannot make it on 1,200 calories a day without losing my mind. I get too hungry, too mean. When I get enough cannabis, I'm more emotionally stable and balanced. Things don't bother me as much, and I can live with being hungry..."

"When I do want to eat past my calorie limit, I take a quick inhalation, and within minutes, I have enough willpower to resist food." (A Woman's Guide to Cannabis, 21-3).

Although insufficiently portrayed in the data, the consumption ritual of smoking cannabis can be speculated to involve tangible elements of contagious and imitative magic which allow the transfer of special powers into the individual (Frazier 1890/1959; Fernandez & Lastovicka 2011). First of all, the special powers attributed to cannabis are contagiously transferred in the inhalation and exhalation of smoke, passing the culturally salient inside/outside boundary of the body twice (e.g. Anttonen 1996; Douglas 1970). The formless smoke may also constitute a potent “template” for imitative magic where good spirits are inhaled, and bad spirits exhaled.

In another context, cannabis is seen to ritualize a parent’s optimism for the struggle of her children’s bedtime rituals which she calls “the witching hour” (Weed Mom, 112):

“My daughter’s bedtime, on the other hand is a baseball game with extra innings... It’s sweet, yes, but long. Then we must pray... I silently pray. Please let this be over soon...

But... if I’ve had the foresight to take a few puffs of one of my favorite chill strains, like Kosher Kush or Blue Zkittlez, game time looks and feels different...

I’m definitely still me – just more attuned to my kid’s emotional needs. More generous with myself and my time.” (Weed Mom, 113-4, emphasis in original).

Here cannabis use is constructed as an emotive yet effective technical means for fulfilling the practical end of meeting children’s emotional needs. Gell (1992) suggests that “magic” is an ideal technical means against which other strenuous, laborious means of technical production are compared. Here, the same practical end that without cannabis is felt to provoke feelings of desperation and exhaustion due to the bedtime ritual’s strenuous demands is now compared to the magical means of cannabis consumption which effortlessly evokes a “more attuned” version of the parent.

In the above excerpts, however, the ritual dimension of magical practice is backgrounded. The ritual dimension can be discerned more prevalently in the context of sex. In the ritual practice of *cannabis sex magic*, cannabis functions as a ritual artifact imbued with special

powers (Rook 1985) which the consumer intends to channel towards the fulfillment of sexual desires.

“...cannabis is such a helpful tool because ‘it helps address the things that are getting in the way of pleasure...’ ‘By intentionally choosing cannabis products that address those factors, you can enhance your sexual experience,’ says Manta, who coined the term Cannasexual to mean someone who consciously chooses cannabis for elevating pleasure and intimacy” (Weed Mom, 193).

The terms “intentionally” and “consciously” are critical since they highlight the conception that neither augmented pleasure nor enhanced sexual performance are *inherent* attributes of cannabis, but rather special powers that the consumer purposely attributes to a ritual artifact and then evokes through ritual acts. The transformation of intention into power is at the heart of magical practice (Arnould et al. 1999). Without intentional ritual evocations, immanent forces remain unmoved:

“...intention matters; smoking or ingesting any kind of weed product isn’t a magic horny button... combining cannabis and sex in a healthy way requires you to want sex, to feel safe with your partner, and go get down willingly” (Weed Mom, 197, emphasis in original).

With proper ritual evocations the individual may come in contact with “immanent forces” (Arnould et al. 1999, 38) via the special powers attributed to cannabis. In the following excerpt, cannabis is attributed special powers that are considered fundamentally feminine (see also the Hedonist section). By combining the consumption of the magical, feminine cannabis with proper ritual acts (i.e. “focusing your awareness”), the individual comes in contact with cannabis’ feminine forces which the individual may channel for the fulfillment of sexual desires, thus effectively seducing herself (Belk et al. 2003).

“...it’s really helpful for women to be able to switch over to the gathering operating system – the feminine side of us that’s softer, more process-oriented, and open to possibilities... ‘women and women-identified people typically need more time to get ready for sex,’ and cannabis can help us put aside those work and parenting roles.

Decreasing stress and anxiety and focusing your awareness on the here and now are incredibly important parts of pleasure” (Weed Mom 196).

The book *Cannabis for Couples* provides detailed cannabis ritual practices – such as chants and detailed guides – for directing intensions and emotions towards sexual empowerment. The following is a brief excerpt from a “mental refocusing process that leads you down through your body from head to genitals“ that is intended to be practiced after consuming cannabis (*Cannabis for Couples*, 133):

“Now go ahead and expand your awareness downward to include the sexual realms awaiting in your genitals... let your pelvis rotate a bit as you inhale and exhale... feel whatever charge of sexual desire and passion you might tap into with each new breath...” (Cannabis for Couples, 134).

Following Rook (1985), three ritual elements can be identified: a ritual artefact (i.e. cannabis), a ritual script (i.e. a focusing practice), and a ritual performance (i.e. role of a partner). These components give rise to something more than their sum; they give rise to *cannabis sex magic*. In this ritual, “immanent powers” (i.e. “awaiting in your genitals”) are evoked through ritual acts “to achieve certain ends,” in this case sexual arousal (see Arnould et al. 1999, 38).

Finally, “magic always has both existential and social consequences, and is at once both instrumental and expressive” (Arnould et al. 1999, 38). Although magic evades mechanistic explanation, its material consequence is essential to it (Arnould et al. 1999). The site of recognizing and comprehending the transformative powers of magical praxis is the body (see Arnould et al. 1999). As Arnould et al. (1999, 45) put it, “magic is an embodied practice” that “works on and through the human body.” Here, the successful evocations of cannabis’ powers are registered in the body as euphoria. This allows the individual to “drop into [herself]” (existential consequence) and adequately perform the yoga routine (social consequence). The material end is a healthy, re-nourished and glowing individual:

“Sophie Saint Thomas tells me that using cannabis in itself doesn’t necessarily constitute self-care; it’s more about the plant’s ability to help remove a layer of the judging, task-oriented mind so you can be present enough in your body to figure out

what you actually need. 'The euphoria cannabis provides,' she tells me, 'really allows you to drop into yourself so you can actually do your self-care and become re-nourished and glowing.'" (Weed Mom, 243, emphasis in original).

"Cannabis is the only medicine I take, but it doesn't work by itself. I still need to do yoga and move my body through its entire range of motion to keep everything healthy and pain-free, and I still need to meditate on a daily basis to reduce stress and anxiety. Using cannabis makes it easier for me to do the things I need to do to get and stay healthy, because getting high and doing yoga and meditation feels amazing." (A Woman's Guide to Cannabis, 8).

Contrariety of Morality: Religious Devotion

The final tension in the semiotic square to be inspected is the *contrariety of morality* between the Progressive and the Purist. The *contrariety of morality* refers to the Progressive's and the Purist's opposing views on how cannabis use benefits the collective good. The Progressive celebrates the fact that cannabis supports contemporary society's conventions; the Purist celebrates cannabis' ability to reveal and dissolve dogmatic societal conventions. A synthesis between the positions is named *Religious Devotion* which denotes a *commitment* to cannabis consumption as in a consumption subculture (e.g. Schouten & McAlexander 1995; Kozinets 2001). In a consumption subculture, a shared consumption activity assumes a profound significance in the devoted individuals' lives, so much so that certain aspects of society's dominant moral order may be re-negotiated and rejected, effectively giving shape to a distinct system of values which deviates from the mainstream (ibid.).

A Cannabis Consumption Subculture

In the following, I inspect the stories of two groups of people who get together to sacramentally consume cannabis. I approach these narratives as accounts of consumption subcultures (e.g. Schouten & McAlexander 1995; Kozinets 2001). Furthermore, due to the religious theme and the explicit reference to cannabis as "sacred," I inspect these narratives

through the concept of the sacred as theorized in the Durkheimian (1915), sociological tradition (Belk et al. 1989; Douglas 1999/1975; Anttonen 1996).

Consumption may assume a profound significance and touch on “virtually all aspects [of life], including the social, the political and the spiritual” (Schouten & McAlexander 1995, 50). In such case, a consumption phenomenon, object etc. becomes an “organizing symbol,” “a religious icon” (ibid.) which gives shape to a distinct system of values, an ideology, and a whole lifestyle. Indeed, salient consumption objects within consumption subcultures (e.g. Schouten & McAlexander 1995; Kozinets 2001) have been shown to assume sacred qualities, although in an implicit manner as is characteristic in the secularized West (Belk et al. 1989; Rinallo et al. 2013). Here I inspect the stories of two different groups, “The Hawaii THC Ministry” and “The Pot Illuminati,” both of which explicitly refer to cannabis as “sacred” and a “sacrament.”

Previous research finds the boundaries of consumption subcultures to be relatively permeable in comparison to classic subcultures which tend to involve individuals from a particular socio-economic background (Thompson & Troester 2002). “The Hawaii THC Ministry” is a community brought together by the shared activity of sacramental cannabis consumption (e.g. Cannabis and Spirituality). It is claimed that the group members do not share a common socio-economic background but are brought together by the profound significance that cannabis consumption assumes in their lives:

“We’re a cannabis ministry, not a Bible ministry. What brings us together is the sacrament of cannabis, not any particular belief system.” (Cannabis and Spirituality, 210).

“...we welcome those who generally weren’t welcomed to other churches. We wanted the dropouts, the ostracized, the homeless, the unique and special “weirdos” of society on all levels. The only criteria is that they were sincere.” (Cannabis and Spirituality, 211).

It is felt important that the whole group “sincerely” shares the conception of cannabis as more than just a drug. The Durkheimian, sociological tradition understands sacred objects as representations of the collective interests of a particular community (e.g. Anttonen 1996;

Belk et al. 1989; Douglas 1999/1975). What clinches the cohesion of the cannabis ministry is not merely the consumption of cannabis but the attribution of the sacred status to cannabis. A community's shared attribution of the status of the sacred to an object, phenomenon etc. clinches group cohesion (Douglas 1999/1975):

"...I asked if anyone was there only to get some cannabis, in order to weed them out gently, so to speak. I wanted to create a sense of togetherness and harmony in the room... I only wanted people there who genuinely wanted the group experience." (Cannabis and Spirituality, 212).

The ministry acquires its institutional shape from the "ultimate authority" (Douglas 1999/1975, xiv) of the sacred cannabis. The ministry constructs "a sacred space" that contains the "sacramental use" of cannabis (see also the section Maintaining Sacrality). The site allows individuals to fluidly and safely move from the ordinary into the extraordinary (see also Goulding et al. 2002; Goulding et al. 2009):

"One of the most important aspects of our practices and services at the THC Ministry was providing a sacred space, a sanctuary for cannabis use. Looking out our six front windows onto the ocean and across Hilo Bay we can see Coconut Island, once an ancient Hawaiian pu'uhonua or sanctuary. That's partly where my inspiration to create a safe place – for those sincere practitioners of the use of cannabis as a spiritual sacrament – came from." (Cannabis and Spirituality, 211).

The story of another group, "The Pot Illuminati," illuminates that the sacrament of cannabis is attributed the authority and potential to give shape to a whole cannabis "society." The cannabis ceremony functions as a context where value-laden aspects of life are negotiated. The sacramental use of cannabis also gives shape to the ceremonial structure itself. In the following it is stated that the participants in the group's rituals are encouraged to use their creativity to "harmonize" their own spiritual practices (Cannabis and Spirituality, 216):

"The most important aspect... is a willingness to learn from the ceremonies and rituals of all cultures without having to submit to any of their dogmas. Just as plants achieve hybrid vigor, so do cultures when ceremonies are allowed to mix freely. I like ceremonies to be improvisational and prefer that the role of 'high priest' not be

assigned to any one person, so that everyone gets an opportunity to wear the big hat.” (Cannabis and Spirituality, 216).

According to Anttonen (1996, 34), ritual is a “context of negotiation par excellence” where notable changes in salient cultural-cognitive categories are resolved with the boundary category of the sacred that “separates, binds, transcends and purifies” (Anttonen 2005, 198). The sacred as a “boundary category” denotes an indescribable yet undeniably real and powerful base construct (i.e. “that’s just the way it is”) (also Douglas 1999/1975, xvi) that is used to *negotiate the boundaries* of cultural-cognitive categories that maintain social order and cohesion of systems of thought and perception (Anttonen 1996). In the following, the sacred cannabis is attributed the power to give shape to a societal system that diverges from oppressive systems of domination. This “planetary awakening” via the sacrament of cannabis is called “the New Pot Enlightenment.”

“Cannabis as a sacrament has an essential role to play in planetary awakening and harmonizing. I call this the New Pot Enlightenment. Cannabis represents the end of bigotry, cultural hatred, and war for religion. It’s a sacrament of peace...

Part of the New Pot Enlightenment is understanding that we can create pot-friendly societies and that it’s a good idea to organize in groups so we can establish a ceremonial culture that can be passed down...

The Pot Illuminati, as faithful stewards and advocates of cannabis, claim our right to determine, shape and protect the future of cannabis from state and corporate domination and exploitation.” (Cannabis and Spirituality 216-8).

In summary, “religious devotion” to cannabis is theorized to revolve around the assignment of the *semantic attribute* of the “sacred” (Anttonen 1996) to cannabis. Cannabis becomes an object of worship; it is set apart from the conventional, profane categories of ordinary life (see also Belk et al. 1989; Douglas 1999/1975). The sacred cannabis is located as the source of indescribable and undeniable power that is collectively felt to evoke profound changes in ordinary thought. According to Anttonen (1996, 213), the sacred tends to emerge in “value-laden situations” where there is a “socially marked change” in the meanings of the culture’s most salient categories. Indeed, the meanings attached to cannabis consumption are shown

to collide with those of dominant value systems. The notion of progress is re-established and distinguished from the dogmas of oppressive institutions. This effectively gives shape to a distinct community of cannabis consumers.

Discussion and Conclusions

This thesis has conducted a discourse analysis on six recently published *cannabis self-help books* to further understanding on *the celebratory discourses of cannabis consumption* (Sandberg 2011; Sandberg 2012; Holm et al. 2013; Holm et al. 2015). The empirical materials are situated in the context of legal cannabis consumption in the U.S. where, along the recent market and policy developments, cultural intermediaries (Cronin 2004; Maguire & Matthews 2012; Negus 2002) have recognized the need to educate – or perhaps gently manipulate (Bourdieu 1984, 365) – consumers in a way that allows them to develop a positive relationship to cannabis. These market-mediated texts depict an image of an ideal consumer (Arnould & Thompson 2005) who, through the mastery of culturally fine-tuned forms of cannabis consumption, attains a “happy, healthy and holy” life, as goes the books’ frequently repeated adage. This thesis has chosen these books as empirical materials to attain a thorough understanding of the full width of the celebratory narratives attached to cannabis consumption phenomena.

This thesis has answered the call to investigate the different ways that cannabis use is celebrated (Sandberg 2011; Sandberg 2012; Holm et al. 2013; Holm et al. 2015). Specifically, this thesis extends Sandberg’s (2011; 2012) previous work on the celebratory discourses of cannabis consumption firstly, by identifying *four distinct celebratory positions* named the Progressive, the Purist, the Hedonist, and the Optimizer. These four celebratory positions with distinct purposes and practices of cannabis consumption expand the category of celebration beyond the monolithic (ibid.). To summarize each position, the Progressive celebrates cannabis as a tool for socially progressive ends (predominantly in the form of medicine); the Purist celebrates cannabis use as a way to create profound shifts in ordinary thought; the Hedonist celebrates cannabis use as a way to augment pleasure and immerse oneself into recreation; the Optimizer celebrates cannabis as a performance-enhancing drug.

Secondly, this thesis has inspected the relations between these celebratory positions with the help of the semiotic square (Greimas 1987; in consumer research e.g. Kozinets 2008; Humphreys 2010; Floch 1988). The semiotic square locates two syntheses, *Religious Devotion* between the Progressive and the Purist, and *Cannabis Magic* between the Optimizer and the Hedonist. The syntheses denote the range of possible combinations between their respective celebratory constituents. Religious Devotion refers to the range of consumption phenomena where cannabis use attains such a profound significance in the individual's life that it effectively gives shape to a distinct system of values that deviates from the order of the dominant cultural system (e.g. Schouten & McAlexander 1995; Kozinets 2001). Cannabis Magic refers to consumers' willful blending of practical motives of cannabis use with aesthetic and emotional ones (e.g. Arnould et al. 1999).

The semiotic square also illustrates that the pursuits of the Progressive and the Hedonist, as well as those of the Purist and the Optimizer, are mutually exclusive in relation to each other. To elaborate, the Progressive's pursuit to use cannabis as a tool for socially progressive ends contradicts the Hedonist's use of cannabis as a way to break away from the responsibilities of everyday life into the inherent pleasures of play. Also, whereas the Purist celebrates cannabis' *overwhelming power* to create profound shifts in ordinary thought and perception, the Optimizer, in contradiction, is threatened by these overwhelming effects and instead celebrates the fact that cannabis' effects can be controlled and predicted in a way that allows her to use cannabis as a performance-enhancing drug. This finding suggests that to group cannabis users and their purposes of cannabis use into a single category may be deficient for understanding the full width of cannabis consumption phenomena. It also suggests that future investigative efforts of cannabis consumption phenomena, and potentially of other drug use as well, ought not be limited exclusively to evidently recreational contexts. In specific, consumption practices such as microdosing may be employed with the purpose of improving the individual's capacity to perform the responsibilities of an economically productive citizen in everyday life contexts, rather than as a way to break away from these contexts into a separate realm of leisure (Goulding et al. 2002; Goulding et al. 2009). This particular practice marks the clearest departure from Sandberg's (2012) suggestion that cannabis use involves a "role-playing" that frames it as oppositional to modern society. The consumption narratives about microdosing emphasize exactly the consumer's active effort to be untouched by the undeniably oppositional meanings attached to cannabis use. At least the intended role is the role of a responsible, productive individual.

As the global trend of legalization is expected to continue, the market can be also expected to introduce innovations that make new forms of consumption possible (Huff et al. 2021). In addition to material resources, the market also offers ideological, mythic and symbolic resources which consumers creatively use to make sense of their unique lives (Thompson 2004; Arnould & Thompson 2005). This thesis has inspected the new “innovative” ways of celebrating cannabis use that cultural intermediaries, the need merchants (Bourdieu 1984, 365), have put forth. The cannabis self-help authors – some of whom are also retailers in the industry – have seized the opportunity to advertise the benefits of cannabis use in the form of an authoritative guide for consumers who were previously beyond the black market’s reach. Retailers have recognized moms, “ladies,” and “type-A personalities” as an attractive target market for an inexpressibly diverse array of cannabis products. The role of cultural intermediaries in discovering and legitimizing the needs, wants and desires to be satisfied with these products is not irrelevant. Consumers hesitate to pursue desires they cannot justify for themselves (Belk et al. 2003). In contrast to the common belief, the function of marketing is not to dupe individuals into mindless consumption, but exactly to offer tools that turn mindless consumption into meaningful consumption (Arnould & Thompson 2005). Cannabis seems to allow the attachment of a miraculously diverse range of positive meanings to it, some of which even contradict each other. Cannabis is a stimulant, a depressant and a hallucinogen (Hathaway & Sharpley 2010); it is used medicinally, recreationally, sacramentally and as a performance-enhancing drug. Evidently consumers play an active role in devising their destinies in this particular domain of consumption. Future consumer research could in turn inspect consumers’ interpretative strategies regarding the mass-mediated celebratory meanings attached to cannabis. Such research may be pertinent due to the diversity of meanings attached to cannabis. This thesis has laid a foundation for such a research program by laying out a description of the field of celebratory meanings attached to cannabis consumption.

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